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Eminent Women Series

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GEORGE SAND

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BY

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PREFATORY NOTE.

The authentic materials available for an account of the life of George Sand, although lately increased by the publication of a large part of her correspondence, are still incomplete. Her memoirs by her own hand, dealin fully with her early life alone, remain unsupplemented by any entire and detailed biography, for which indeed the time seems hardly yet come. Hence one among many obvious difficulties in the way of this attempt to prepare for English readers a brief sketch that shall at least indicate all the more salient features of a life of singularly varied aspect.

Much, though of interest in itself, must here be omitted, as beyond the scope of the present study. There are points again into which, as touching persons still living or quite recently deceased, it would be

premature to enter. But none seem of such importance as to forbid the endeavour, by a careful review of those facts in the life of George Sand which most justly represent her character as a whole, and were the determining influences on her career and on her work, to arrive at truth and completeness of general outline, the utmost it is possible to hope to accomplish in this little volume.

Bertha Thomas.

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GEORGE SAND.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY YEARS.

In naming George Sand we name something more exceptional than even a great genius. Her rise to eminence in the literature of her century is, if not without a parallel, yet absolutely without a precedent, in the annals of women of modern times.

The origin of much that is distinctive in the story of her life may be traced in the curious story of her lineage.

George Sand was of mixed national descent, and in her veins ran the blood of heroes and of kings. The noble and the artist, the *bourgèoisie* and the people, all had their representatives among her immediate ancestors. Her grandmother, the guardian of her girlhood, was the child of Maurice, Marshal Saxe, that favourite figure in history and romance, himself son of the

famous Augustus II., Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, and the Swedish Countess Aurora von Königsmark. The Marshal's daughter Aurore, though like her father of illegitimate birth—her mother, who was connected with the stage, passed by her professional name of Mdlle. Verrières—obtained after the Marshal's death the acknowledgment and protection of his relatives in high places, notably of his niece, the Dauphine of France, grand-daughter of Augustus of Poland, and mother of the three kings—Louis XVI., Louis XVIII., and Charles X.

Carefully educated at St. Cyr, Mdlle. de Saxe was married, when little more than a child, to the Count de Horn, who was also of partly royal but irregular origin. He very shortly afterwards fell in a duel. His widow, at thirty, became the wife of M. Dupin de Francueil, an old gentleman of good provincial family and some fortune. Maurice, their only child, was the father of George Sand.

Madame Dupin (the suffix de Francueil was afterwards dropped by her husband) appears to have inherited none of the adventurous and erratic tendencies of her progenitors. Aristocratic in her sympathies, philosophic in her intellect, and strictly decorous in her conduct, throughout the whole of her long and chequered life she was regarded with respect. Left a widow again, ten years after her second marriage, she concentrated her hopes and affections on her handsome

and amiable son Maurice. Though fondly attached to her, he was yet to be the cause of her heaviest sorrows, by his more than hazardous marriage, and by his premature and tragical fate.

His strongest natural leanings seem to have been towards art in general, music and the drama in particular, and of his facile, buoyant, artist temperament there is ample evidence; but the political conditions of France under the Directory in 1798 left him no choice but to enter the army, where he served under Dupont, winning his commission on the field of Marengo in 1800. It was during this Italian campaign that the young officer met with the woman who, four years later, became his wife, and the mother of his illustrious child.

Mademoiselle Sophie Victoire Delaborde was, emphatically speaking, a daughter of the people. Her father had been a poor bird-seller at Paris, where she herself had worked as a milliner. Left unprotected at a very early age, thoroughly uneducated and undisciplined, gifted with considerable beauty, and thrown on the world at a time when the very foundations of society seemed to be collapsing, she had been exposed to extreme dangers, and without any of the ordinary safeguards against them. That she proved herself not undeserving of the serious attachment with which she inspired Maurice Dupin, her least favourable judges were afterwards forced to admit; though, at the time,

this infatuation of the lieutenant of six-and-twenty for one four years his senior, and of the humblest extraction, and whose life hitherto had not been blameless, was naturally regarded as utterly disastrous by his elders.

The devoted pair were married secretly at Paris in 1804; and on the 5th of July in the same year—the last of the French Republic and the first of the Empire—their daughter entered the world, receiving the name of Amantine-Lucile-Aurore.

The discovery of the *mésalliance* she had been dreading for some time, and which her son had not dared to confess to her, was a heavy blow to old Madame Dupin. However she schooled herself to forgive what was irrevocable, and to acknowledge this most unwelcome daughter-in-law, the infant Aurore helping unconsciously to effect the reconciliation. But for more than three years M. Dupin's mother and his wife scarcely ever met. Madame Dupin *mère* was living in a retired part of the country, in the very centre of France, on the little property of Nohant, which she had bought with what the Revolution had left her out of her late husband's fortune. Maurice, now Captain Dupin and *aide-de-camp* to Murat, resided, when not on service, in Paris where he had settled with his wife and child. The union, strange though it may seem, continued to be a happy one. Besides a strong attachment there existed a real conformity of disposi-

tion between the two. The mother of George Sand was also, in her way, a remarkable woman. She has been described by her daughter as "a great artist lost for want of development"; showing a wonderful dexterity in whatever she put her hand to, no matter if practised in it or not. "She tried everything, and always succeeded"—sewing, drawing, tuning the piano—"she would have made shoes, locks, furniture, had it been necessary." But her tastes were simple and domestic. Though married out of her rank, she was entirely without any vain ambition to push herself into fashionable society, the constraint of which, moreover, she could not bear. "She was a woman for the fire-side, or for quick, merry walks and drives. But in the house or out of doors, what she wanted was intimacy and confidence, complete sincerity in her relations with those around her, absolute liberty in her habits and the disposal of her time. She always led a retired life, more anxious to keep aloof from tiresome acquaintance than to seek such as might be advantageous. That was just the foundation of my father's character; and in this respect never was there a better-assorted couple. They could never be happy except in their own little *ménage*. Everywhere out of it they had to stifle their melancholy yawns, and they have transmitted to me that secret shyness which has always made the gay world intolerable, and home a necessity to me."

In a modest *bourgeois* habitation in the Rue Meslay,

afterwards transferred to the Rue Grange-Batelière, Aurore Dupin's infancy passed tranquilly away, under the wing of her warmly affectionate mother who, though utterly illiterate, showed intuitive tact and skill in fostering the child's intelligence. "Mine," says her daughter, "made no resistance; but was never beforehand with anything, and might have been very much behindhand if left to itself."

Aurore was not four years old when adventures began for her in earnest. In the spring of 1808, her father was at Madrid in attendance upon Murat; and Madame Maurice Dupin, becoming impatient of prolonged separation from her husband, started off with her little girl to join him. The hazards and hardships of the expedition, long mountain drives and wild scenery, strange fare and strange sights, could not fail vividly to impress the child, whose imagination from her cradle was extraordinarily active. Her mother ere this had discovered that Aurore, then little more than a baby, and pent up within four chairs to keep her out of harm's way, would make herself perfectly happy, plucking at the basket-work and babbling endless fairy tales to herself, confused and diluted versions of the first fictions narrated to her. A picturesque line in a nursery song was enough to bring before her a world of charming wonders; the figures, birds, and flowers on a Sèvres china candelabrum would call up enchanting landscapes; and the sound of a flageolet

played from some distant attic start a train of melodious fancies and throw her into musical raptures. Her daily experiences, after reaching Madrid with her mother, continued to be novel and exciting in the extreme. The palace of the Prince de la Paix, where Murat and his suite had their quarters, was to her the realisation of the wonder-land of Perrault and d'Aulnoy; Murat, the veritable Prince Fanfarinet. She was presented to him in a fancy court-dress, devised for the occasion by her mother, an exact imitation of her father's uniform in miniature, with spurs, sword, and boots, all complete. The Prince was amused by the jest, and took a fancy to the child, calling her his little *aide-de-camp*. After a residence of several weeks in this abode, whose splendour was alloyed by not a little discomfort and squalor, the return-journey had to be accomplished in the height of summer, amid every sort of risk; past reeking battle-fields, camps, sacked and half-burnt villages, and beleaguered cities. Captain Dupin succeeded, however, in escorting his family safely back into France again, the party halting to recruit awhile under his mother's roof.

Nohant, a spot that has become as famous through its associations as Abbotsford, lies about three miles from the little town of La Châtre, in the department of the Indre, part of the old province of Berry. The manor is a plain grey house with steep mansarde roofs, of the time of Louis XVI. It stands just apart from

the road, shaded by trees, beside a pleasure ground of no vast extent, but with its large flower-garden and little wood allowed to spread at nature's bidding, quite in the English style. Behind the house cluster a score of cottages of the scattered hamlet of Nohant; in the centre rises the smallest of churches, with a tiny cemetery hedged around and adjoining the wall of the manor garden.

At this country home the tired travellers gladly alighted; but they had barely a few weeks in which to recover from the fatigues of their Spanish campaign, when a terrible calamity overwhelmed the household. Maurice Dupin, riding home one night from La Châtre, was thrown from his horse and killed on the spot.

The story of Aurore Dupin's individual life opens at once with the death of her father—a loss she was still too young to comprehend, but for which she was soon to suffer through the strange, the anomalous position, in which it was to place her. Maurice Dupin's patrician mother and her plebeian daughter-in-law, bereft thus violently of him who had been the only possible link between them, found themselves hopelessly, actively, and increasingly at variance. Their tempers clashed, their natures were antipathetic, their views contradictory, their positions irreconcileable. Aurore was not only thrust into an atmosphere of strife, but condemned to be the apple of discord. She

was to grow up between two hostile camps, each claiming her obedience and affection.

The beginning was smooth, and the sadness which alone kept the peace was not allowed to weigh on the child. She ran wild in the garden, the country air and country life strengthening a naturally strong constitution; and her intelligence, though also allowed much freedom in its development, was not neglected. A preceptor was on the spot in the person of the fourth inmate of Nohant, an old pedagogue, Deschartres by name, formerly her father's tutor, who had remained in Madame Dupin's service as "intendant." The serio-comic figure of this personage, so graphically drawn by George Sand herself in the memoirs of her early life, will never be forgotten by any reader of those reminiscences. Pedant, she says, was written in every line of his countenance and every movement that he made. He was possessed of some varied learning, much narrow prejudice, and a violent crotchety temper; but had proved during the troubles of the Revolution his sincere and disinterested devotion to the family he served, and Aurore and "the great man," as she afterwards nicknamed her old tutor, were always good friends.

Before she was four years old she could read quite well; but she remarks that it was only after learning to write that what she read began to take a definite meaning for her. The fairy-tales perused but half

intelligently before were re-read with a new delight. She learnt grammar with Deschartres, and from her grandmother took her first lessons in music, an art of which she became passionately fond; and it always remained for her a favourite source of enjoyment, though she never acquired much proficiency as a musical performer. The educational doctrines of Rousseau had then brought into fashion a *régime* of open-air exercise and freedom for the young, such as we commonly associate with English, rather than French, child-life; and Aurore's early years—when domestic hostilities and nursery tyrannies, from which, like most sensitive children, she suffered inordinately, were suspended—were passed in the careless, healthy fashion approved in this country. A girl of her own age, but of lower degree, was taken into the house to share her studies and pastimes. Little Ursule was to become, in later years, the faithful servant of her present companion, who had then become lady of the manor, and who never lost sight of this humble friend. Aurore had also a boy playmate in a *protégé* of her grandmother's, five years her senior, who patronised and persecuted her by turns, in true fraternal fashion. This boy Hippolyte, the son of a woman of low station, was in fact Aurore's half-brother, adopted from his birth and brought up by Madame Dupin the elder, whose indulgence, where her son was concerned, was infinite. With these, and the children of the farm-

tenants and rural proprietors around, Aurore did not want for companions. But the moment soon arrived when the painful family dispute of which she was the object, was to become the cause of more distress to the child than to her elders. There were reasons which stood in the way of Madame Maurice Dupin's fixing her residence permanently under her mother-in-law's roof. But the mind of the latter was set on obtaining the guardianship of her granddaughter, the natural heir to her property, and on thus assuring to her social and educational privileges of a superior order. The child's heart declared unreservedly for her mother, whose passionate fondness she returned with the added tenderness of a deeper nature, and all attempts to estrange the two had only drawn them closer together. But the pecuniary resources of Maurice Dupin's widow were of the smallest, and the advantages offered to her little girl by the proposed arrangement so material, that the older lady gained her point in the end. Madame Maurice settled in Paris. Aurore grew up her grandmother's ward, with Nohant for her home; a home she was to keep, knowing no other, till the end of her life.

The separation was brought about very gradually to the child. The first few winters were spent in Paris, where her grandmother had an establishment. Then she could pass whole days with her mother, who, in turn, spent summers at Nohant, and Aurore for years was

buoyed up by the hope that a permanent reunion would still be brought about. But meantime domestic jealousy and strife, inflamed by the unprincipled meddling of servants, raged more fiercely than ever, and could not but be a source of more than ordinary childish misery to their innocent object. It was but slowly that she became attached to her grandmother, whose undemonstrative temper, formal habits, and condescending airs were little calculated to win over her young affections, or fire her with gratitude for the anxiety displayed by this guardian to form her manners and cultivate her intellect. Nay, the result was rather to implant in her a premature dislike and distrust for conventional ideals. From the standard of culture and propriety, from the temptations of social rank and wealth held up for her preference, she instinctively turned to the simple unrestrained affection of the despised mother, and the greater freedom and expansion enjoyed in such company. In vain did disdainful lady's maids try to taunt her into precocious worldly wisdom, asking if she could really want to go and eat beans in a little garret. Such a condition, naturally, she began to regard as the equivalent of a noble and glorious existence!

Meantime, throughout all these alternations of content and distress, Nohant and its surroundings were perforce becoming dear to her, as only the home of our childhood can ever become. The scenery and characteristics of that region are familiar to all readers

of the works of George Sand; a quiet region of narrow, winding, shady lanes, where you may wander long between the tall hedges without meeting a living creature but the wild birds that start from the honeysuckle and hawthorn, and the frogs croaking among the sedges; a region of soft-flowing rivers with curlew-haunted reed beds, and fields where quails cluck in the furrows; the fertile plain studded with clumps of ash and alder, and a rare farm-habitation standing amid orchards and hemp-fields, or a rarer hamlet of a dozen cottages grouped together. The country is flat, and, viewed from the rail or high road, unimpressive. But those fruitful fields have a placid beauty, and it needs but to penetrate the sequestered lanes and explore the thicket-bound courses of the streams, to meet with plenty of those pleasant solitudes after a poet's own heart, whose gift it is to seize and perpetuate transient effects, and to open the eyes of duller minds to charms that might pass unnoticed. In this sense only can George Sand be said to have idealised for us the landscapes she loved.

The thoughtful, poetic side of her temperament showed itself early, leading her to seek long intervals of solitude, when she would bury herself in books or dreams, to satisfy the cravings of her intellect and imagination. On the other hand, her vigorous physical organization kept alive her taste for active amusements and merry companionship. So the child-squire romped

on equal terms with the little rustics of Nohant, sharing their village sports and the occupations of the seasons as they came round: hay-making and gleaning in summer; in winter weaving bird-nets to spread in the snowy fields for the wholesale capture of larks; anon listening with mixed terror and delight to the picturesque legends told by the hemp-beaters, as they sat at their work out of doors on September moonlight evenings —to all the traditional ghost-stories of the "Black Valley," as she fancifully christened the country round about. Tales were these of fantastic animals and goblins, the *grand'-bête* and the *levrette blanche,* Georgeon, that imp of mischief, night apparitions of witches and charmers of wolves, singing Druidical stones and mysterious portents—a whole fairy mythology, then firmly believed in by the superstitious peasantry.

As a signal contrast to this way of life came for a time the annual visits to Paris—suspended after she was ten years old. There liberty ended, and the girl was transported into a novel and most uncongenial sphere. Her grandmother's friends and relatives were mostly old people, who clung to antiquated modes and customs; and distinguished though such circles might be, the youngest member only found out that they were intolerably dull. The wrinkled countesses with their elaborate toilettes and ceremonious manners, the *abbés* with their fashionable tittle-tattle and their innumerable snuff-boxes, the long dinners, the accomplish-

ment-lessons, notably those in dancing and deportment, were repugnant to the soul of the little hoyden. She made amends to herself by observing these new scenes and characters narrowly, with the acute natural perception that was one of her leading gifts. From this artificial atmosphere of constraint, it was inevitable that she should welcome hours of escape into her mother's unpretending domestic circle; and already at ten years old she had pronounced the lot of a scullery-maid enviable, compared to that of an old *marquise.*

Nevertheless the fact of her having, at an age when impressions are strongest and most lasting, mixed freely and on equal terms with the upper classes of society, was a point in her education not without its favourable action on her afterwards as a novelist. Despite her firm Republican sympathies, emphatic disdain for mere rank and wealth, and her small mercy for the foibles of the fashionable world, she can enter into its spirit, paint its allurements without exaggeration, and indicate its shortcomings with none of that asperity of the outsider which always suggests some unconscious envy lurking behind the scorn.

The despised accomplishment-lessons, in themselves tending only to so much agreeable dabbling, proved useful to her indirectly by creating new interests, and as an intellectual stimulus. There seems to have been little or no method about her early education. The study of her own language was neglected, and the time

spent less profitably, she considered, in acquiring a smattering of Latin with Deschartres. She took to some studies with avidity, while others remained wholly distasteful to her. For mere head-work she cared little. Arithmetic she detested; versification, no less. Her imagination rebelled against the restrictions of form. Nowhere, perhaps, except in the free-fantasia style of the novel, could this great prose-poet have found the right field in which to do justice to her powers. The dry *technique* in music was a stumbling-block of which she was impatient. History and literature she enjoyed in whatever they offered that was romantic, heroic, or poetically suggestive. In her Nohant surroundings there was nothing to check, and much to stimulate, this dominant imaginative faculty. Her youthful attempts at original composition she quickly discarded in disgust; but it seemed almost a law of her mind that whatever was possessing it she must instinctively weave into a romance. Thus in writing her history-epitome she must improve on the original, when too dry, by exercising her fancy in the descriptions of places and personages. The actual political events of that period were of the most exciting character; Napoleon's Russian campaign, abdication, retreat to Elba, the Hundred Days, Waterloo, the Restoration, following each other in swift succession. Old Madame Dupin was an anti-Bonapartist, but Aurore had caught from her mother some

thing of the popular infatuation for the Emperor, and her fancy would create him over again, as he might have been had his energies been properly directed. Her day-dreams were often so vivid as to affect her senses with all the force of realities.

Such a visionary life might have been most dangerous and mentally enervating had her organisation been less robust, and the tendency to reverie not been matched by lively external perception and plentiful physical activity. As it was, if at one moment she was in a cloudland of her own, or poring over the stories of the Iliad, the classic mythologies, or Tasso's *Gerusalemme*, the next would see her scouring the fields with Ursule and Hippolyte, playing practical jokes on the tutor, and extemporising wild out-of-door games and dances with her village companions.

Of serious religious education she received none at all. Here, again, the authorities were divided. Her mother was pious in a primitive way, though holding aloof from priestly influences. The grandmother, a disciple of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and of Voltaire, had renounced the Catholic creed and was what was then called a Deist. But beyond discouraging a belief in miraculous agencies she preserved a neutrality with her ward on the subject, and Aurore was left free to drift as her nature should decide. Instinctively she felt more drawn towards her mother's unreasoning, emotional faith than towards a system of philosophic,

critical inquiry. But on both sides what was offered her to worship was too indefinite to satisfy her strong religious instincts. Once more she filled in the blank with her imagination, which was forthwith called upon to picture a being who should represent all perfections, human and divine; something that her heart could love, as well as her intelligence approve.

This ideal figure, for whom she devised the name *Corambé*, was to combine all the spiritual qualities the Christian ideal with the earthly grace and beauty of the mythological deities of Greece. For very many years she cherished this fantasy, finding there the scope she sought for her aspirations after superhuman excellence. It is hardly too much to say that the Christianity which had been expressly left out in her teaching she invented for herself. She erected a woodland altar in the recesses of a thicket to this imaginary object of her adoration, and it is a characteristic trait that the sacrifices she chose to offer there were the release of birds and butterflies that had been taken prisoners—as a symbolical oblation most welcome to a divinity whose essential attributes were infinite mercy and love. It will be remembered that a somewhat similar anecdote is related of the youthful Goethe.

Aurore as the years went on had grown sincerely fond of Madame Dupin; but her mother still held the foremost place in her heart, and she had never ceased to cherish the belief that if they two could live together

she would be perfectly happy. The discovery of this deeply irritated her grandmother, who at length was provoked to intimate to the girl something of the real motive for insisting on this separation—namely, that her mother's antecedents were such as, in the eyes of Aurore's well-wishers, rendered it desirable to establish the daughter's existence apart from that ot her parent. Sooner or later such a revelation must have been made; but made as it was, thus precipitately, in a moment of jealous anger, the chief result was of necessity to cause a painful and dangerous shock to the sensitive young mind. It brought about an unnatural discord in her moral nature, forbidden all at once to respect what she had loved most, and must continue to love, in spite of all. On the injurious effects of the over-agitation to which she was subjected in her childhood she has laid much stress in her remarkable work, "The Story of My Life." Much of this book, written when she was between forty and fifty, reads like a romance; and had a certain amount of retrospective imagination entered into the treatment of these reminiscences it would not be surprising. The tendency to impart poetical colour and significance to whatever was capable of taking it was her mastering impulse, and may sometimes have led her to lose the distinction between fancy and reality, especially as by her own confession her memory was never her strong point. But she had an excellent memory for impres-

sions, and no reader whose own recollections of childhood have not grown faint, but will feel the profound truth of the spirit of the narrative, which is of a kind that occasional exaggerations in the letter cannot depreciate in value as a psychological history. For an account of her early life it must always remain the most important source.

Aurore was now thirteen, and though she had read a good deal of miscellaneous literature her instruction had been mostly of a desultory sort; she was behindhand in the accomplishments deemed desirable for young ladies; and her country manners, on the score of etiquette, left something to be desired. To school, therefore, it was decided that she must go; and her grandmother selected that held by the nuns of the "English convent" at Paris, as the most fashionable institution of the kind.

This *Couvent des Anglaises* was a British community first established in the French capital in Cromwell's time. It has now been removed, and its site, the Rue St. Victor, has undergone complete transformation. In 1817, however, it was in high repute among conventual educational establishments. To this retreat Aurore was consigned and there spent more than two years, an untroubled time she has spoken of as in many respects the happiest of her life. There is certainly nothing more delightful in her memoirs than the vivid picture there drawn of the convent-school interior, drawn

without flattery or malice, and with sympathy and animation.

The nunnery was an extensive building of rambling construction—with parts disused and dilapidated—quite a little settlement, counting some 150 inmates, nuns, pupils and teachers; with cells and dormitories, long corridors, chapels, kitchens, distillery, spiral staircases and mysterious nooks and corners; a large garden planted with chestnut trees, a kitchen garden and a little cemetery without gravestones, overgrown with evergreens and flowers. The sisters were all English, Irish, or Scotch, but the majority of the pupils and the secular mistresses were French. Of the nuns their ex-scholar speaks with respect and affection, but their religious exercises left them but the smaller share of their time and attention to devote to the pupils. The girls almost without exception were of high social rank, the *bourgeois* element as yet having scarcely penetrated this exclusive seminary. Aurore formed warm friendships with many of her school-fellows and seems to have been decidedly popular with the authorities as well, in spite of the high spirits which amid congenial company found vent in harmless mischief and a sort of organised playful insubordination. The school had two parties: the *sages* or good girls, and the *diables*, their opposites. Among the latter Aurore conscientiously enrolled herself and became a leader in their escapades, acquiring the sobriquet of "Madcap." These outbreaks

led to nothing more heinous than playing off tricks on a tyrannical mistress, or making raids on the forbidden ground of the kitchen garden. But the charm that held together the confraternity of *diables* was a grand, long-cherished design, to which their best energy and ingenuity were devoted—a secret, heroic-sounding enterprize, set forth as "the deliverance of the victim." A tradition existed among them that a captive was kept languishing miserably in some remote cell, and they had set themselves the task of discovering and liberating this hapless wretch.

It is needless to say that prisoner and dungeon existed in their girlishly romantic brains alone, but easy to see how such a legend might possess itself of their imaginations, and to what bewitching exploits it might invite firm believers. The supervision was not so very strict but that a *diable* of spirit might sometimes play truant from the class-room unnoticed. The truants would then start on an exciting journey of discovery through the tortuous passages, exploring the darkest recesses of the more deserted portions of the convent: now penetrating into the vaults, now adventuring on the roofs, regardless of peril to life or limb. This sublimely ridiculous undertaking, half-sport, half-earnest, so fascinated Aurore as to become the most important occupation of her mind!

The teaching provided for the young ladies appears to have been of the customary superficial order—of

everything a little, a little music, a little drawing, a little Italian. With English she had the opportunity of becoming really conversant, as it was the language commonly spoken in the convent, where also she could not fail to acquire some insight into the English character. This she has treated more fairly than England for long was to treat her. Few of her gifted literary countrymen have done such justice to the sterling good qualities of our nation. Even when, in delineating the Briton, she caricatures those peculiarities with which he is accredited abroad, her blunders seem due to incomplete knowledge rather than to any inability to comprehend the spirit of a people with whom, indeed, she had many points of sympathy. She could penetrate that coldness and constraint of manner so repelling to French natures, and has said of us, with unconventional truth, that our character is in reality more vehement than theirs; but with less mastery over our emotions themselves, we have more mastery over the expression of our emotions. Among her chosen school-comrades were several English girls, but on leaving the convent their paths separated, and in her after life she had but rare opportunities for renewing these early friendships.

Some eighteen months had elapsed in this fashion when Aurore began to tire of *diablerie*. The victim remained undiscoverable. The store of practical jokes was exhausted. Her restless spirit, pent up within

those convent walls, was thirsting for a new experience, —something to fill her heart and life.

It came in the dawn of a religious enthusiasm—different from her mystical dream of *Corambé,* which however poetical was out of harmony with the spirit and ritual of a Catholic convent. But monastic life has its poetical aspects also; and through these it was that its significance first successfully appealed to her. An evening in the chapel, a Titian picture representing Christ on the Mount of Olives, a passage chanced upon in the "Lives of the Saints," brought impressions that awoke in her a new fervour, and inaugurated a period of ardent Catholicism. All vagueness was gone from her devotional aspirations, which now acquired a direct personal import. The change brought a revolution in her general behaviour. She was understood to have been "converted." "Madcap" was now nicknamed "Sainte Aurore" by her profane school-fellows, and she formed the serious desire and intention of becoming a nun.

The sisters, a practical-minded community, behaved with great good sense and discretion. Without distressing the youthful proselyte by casting doubts on her "vocation," they reminded her that the consideration was a distant one, as for years to come her first duty would be to her relatives, who would never sanction her present determination. Her confessor, the Abbé Prémord, a Jesuit and man of the world

was likewise kindly discouraging; and perceiving that her zeal was leading her to morbid self-accusation and asceticism of mood, he shrewdly enjoined upon her as a penance to take part in the sports and pastimes with the rest as heretofore, much to her dismay. But she soon found her liking for these return, and with it her health of mind. Unshaken still in her private belief that she would take the veil in due time, she was content to wait, and in the interval to be a useful and agreeable member of society. No more insubordination, no more mischievous freaks, yet "Sainte Aurore" remained the life and soul of all recreations recognised by authority, which even included little theatrical performances now and then.

She had become more regular in her studies since her mind had taken a serious turn, but her heart was less in them than ever. Considering this, and the deficiencies in the system of instruction itself, it is hardly surprising that when, in the spring of 1820, her grandmother fearing that the monastic idea was taking hold of Aurore in good earnest decided to remove her from the *Couvent des Anglaises*, she knew little more than when first she had entered it.

CHAPTER II.

GIRLHOOD AND MARRIED LIFE.

Aurore Dupin was now fifteen, and so far, though somewhat peculiarly situated, she and her life had presented no very extraordinary features, nor promise of the same. Her energies had flowed into a variety of channels, and manifestly clever and accustomed to take the lead though she might be, no one, least of all herself, seems to have thought of regarding her as a wonder. The Lady Superior of the *Couvent des Anglaises,* who called her " Still Waters," had perhaps an inkling of something more than met the eye, existent in this pupil. But a dozen years were yet to elapse before the moment came when she was to start life afresh for herself on a footing of independence and literary enterprise, and by her first published attempts raise her name at once above the names of the mass of her fellow-creatures.

Old Madame Dupin, warned by failing health that

her end was not far off, would gladly have first assured a husband's protection for her ward, whom she had now succeeded in really dissociating from her natural guardian. The girl's bringing-up, and an almost complete separation for the last five years, had made a gap—in habits of mind and feeling—such as could hardly be quite bridged over, between her mother and herself. But though beginning to be sadly aware of this and of the increasing violence and asperities of poor Madame Maurice Dupin's temper which made peace under one roof with her a matter of difficulty, Aurore hung back from the notion of marriage, and clearly was much too young to be urged into taking so serious a step. So to Nohant she returned from the convent in the spring of 1820. There she continued to strike that judicious compromise between temporal and spiritual duties and pleasures enjoined on her by her clerical adviser. Still bent on choosing a monastic life, when free to choose for herself, she was reconciled in the meantime to take things as they came, and to make herself happy and add to the happiness of her grandmother in the ordinary way. So we find her enjoying the visit of one of her school friends, getting up little plays to amuse the elders, practising the harp, receiving from her brother Hippolyte—now a noisy hussar—during his brief visits home, her first initiation into the arts of riding—for the future her favourite exercise—and of pistol-shooting; and last, but not least, beginning

to suspect that she had learned nothing whatever whilst at school, and setting to work to educate herself, as best she could, by miscellaneous reading.

In the spring of the following year Madame Dupin's health and mental faculties utterly broke down. But she lived on for another ten months. Aurore for the time was placed in a most exceptional position for a French girl of sixteen. She was thrown absolutely on herself and her own resources, uncontrolled and unprotected, between a helpless, half imbecile invalid, and the eccentric, dogmatic pedagogue, Deschartres. Highly susceptible to influences from without, her mind, during their sudden and complete suspension seemed as it were invited to discover and take its own bent.

Piqued by the charge of dense ignorance flung at her by her ex-tutor, and aware that there was truth in it, she would now sit up all night reading, finding her appetite for the secular knowledge she used to despise grow by what it fed upon. The phase of religious exaltation she had recently passed through still gave the tone to her mind, and it was with the works of famous philosophers, metaphysicians, and Christian mystics that she began her studies. Comparing the "Imitation of Christ" with Châteaubriand's "Spirit of Christianity," and struck here and elsewhere with the wide discrepancies and contradictions of opinion manifest between great minds ranging themselves under one theological banner, she was led on to speculations that alarmed

her conscience, and she appealed to her spiritual director, the Abbé Prémord, for advice, fearing lest her faith might be endangered if she read more. He encouraged her to persevere, telling her in no wise to deny herself these intellectual enjoyments. But her rigid Catholicism was doomed from that hour. Hers was that order of mind which can never give ostensible adhesion to a creed whilst morally unconvinced, never accept that refuge of the weak from the torment of doubt, in abdicating the functions of reason and conscience, shifting the onus of responsibility on to others, and agreeing to believe, as it were, by proxy. She had plunged fearlessly and headlong into Aristotle, Bacon, Locke, Condillac, Mably, Leibnitz, Bossuet, Pascal, Montaigne, Montesquieu; beginning to call many things in question and, through the darkness and confusion into which she was sometimes thrown, trying honestly and sincerely to feel her way to some more glorious faith and light.

In the convent she had been familiarised with Romanism under its most attractive aspects. The moral refinement, the mystery, seclusion, and picturesque beauties of that abode had a poetic charm that had carried her irresistibly away. But, confronted with the system in its practical working, she was staggered by many of its features. In the country churches around her she saw the peasantry encouraged in their grossest superstitions, and the ritual, care-

lessly hurried through, degenerate often into mere mockery. The practice of confession, moreover—her ultimate condemnation of which, as an institution whose results for good are scanty, its dangers excessive, will be endorsed by most persons in this country—and the Church's denial of the right of salvation to all outside its pale, revolted her; and she caught at the teaching of those who claimed liberty of conscience. "Reading Leibnitz," she observes, "I became a Protestant without knowing it." That purer and more liberal Christianity she dreamed of had, she discovered, been the ideal of many great men. The step brought her face to face with fresh and grave problems of which, she truly observes, the solutions were beyond her years, and beyond that era. There came to her rare moments of celestial calm and concord, but she owed them to other and indirect sources of inspiration. The study of philosophy, indeed, was not much more congenial to her at sixteen than arithmetic had been at six. In what merely exercised memory and attention she took comparatively but languid interest. Instruction to bring her its full profit must be conveyed through the medium of moral emotion, but the mysterious power of feeling to stimulate intellect was with her immense. She turned now to the poets—to Shakespeare, Byron, Dante, Milton, Virgil, Pope. A poet herself, she discovered that these had more power than controversialists to strengthen her religious con-

victions, as well as to enlarge her mind. Above all, the writings of the poet-moralist, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, helped her towards resolving the question that occupied her, of her true vocation in life, now that her determination to take the veil was not a little shaken.

The midnight student was by turns Amazon and sick-nurse as well. From the fatigue of long watches over her books or by the invalid's bedside, she found a better and more invigorating refreshment than sleep in solitary morning rides across country. Her fearlessness on horseback was madness in the eyes of the neighbours. Riding, then and there, was almost unheard of for ladies, a girl in a riding-habit regarded as simply a Cossack in petticoats, and Mademoiselle Dupin's delight in horse-exercise sufficed to stamp her as eccentric and strong-minded in the opinion of the country gentry and the towns-folk of La Châtre. They had heard of her studies too, and disapproved of them as unlady-like in character. Philosophy was bad enough, but anatomy, which she had been encouraged to take up by Deschartres, himself a proficient in medical science, was worse—sacrilegious, for a person understood to be professedly of a devotional turn of mind. She went game-shooting with the old tutor; he had a mania for the sport, which she humoured though she did not share. But when quails were the object, she owns to having enjoyed her part in the chase, which was to crouch in the furrows

among the green corn, imitating the cry of the birds to entice them within gun-shot of the sportsman. Lastly, finding in the feminine costume-fashions of that period a dire impediment to out-door enterprise of the sort, in a region of no roads, or bad roads, of rivers perpetually in flood, turning the lanes into water-courses for three-fourths of the year, of miry fields and marshy heaths, she procured for herself a suit of boy's clothes, donning blouse and gaiters now and then without compunction for these rough country walks and scrambles.

Here, indeed, was more than enough to raise a hue-and-cry at La Châtre, a small provincial town, probably neither better nor worse than the rest of its class, a class never yet noted for charity or liberality of judgment. The strangest stories began to be circulated concerning her, stories for the most part so false and absurd as to inspire her with a sweeping contempt for public opinion. By a very common phenomenon, she was to incur throughout her life far more censure through freaks, audacious as breaches of custom, but intrinsically harmless, nor likely to set the fashion to others, than is often reserved for errors of a graver nature. The conditions of ordinary middle-class society are designed, like ready-made clothes, to fit the vast majority of human beings, who live under them without serious inconvenience. For the future George Sand to confine her activities within the

very narrow restrictions laid down by the social code of La Châtre was, it must be owned, hardly to be expected. It was perhaps premature to throw down the gauntlet at sixteen, but her inexperience and isolation were complete. The grandmother in her dotage was no counsellor at all. Deschartres, an oddity himself, cared for none of these things. Those best acquainted with her at La Châtre, families the heads of which had known her father well and whose younger members had fraternised with her from childhood upwards, liked her none the less for her unusual proceedings, and defended her stoutly against her detractors.

"You are losing your best friend," said her dying grandmother to her when the end came, in December 1821. Aurore was, indeed, placed in a difficult and painful situation. She had inherited all the property of the deceased who, in her will, expressed her desire that her own nearest relations by her marriage with M. Dupin, a family of the name of de Villeneuve, well-off and highly connected, should succeed her as guardians to her ward. But it was impossible to dispute the claims of Madame Maurice Dupin to the care of her own daughter if she chose to assert them, which she quickly did, bearing off the girl with her to Paris—Nohant being left under the stewardship of Deschartres—and by her unconciliatory behaviour further alienating the other side of the family from whom Aurore,

through no fault of her own, was virtually estranged at the moment when she stood most in need of a friend. Twenty years later they came forward to claim kinship and friendship again: it was then with George Sand, the illustrious writer, become one of the immortals.

Thus her lot was cast for her in her mother's home and plebeian circle of acquaintance. So much the worse, it was supposed, for her prospects, social and matrimonial. This did not distress her, but none the less was the time that followed an unhappy one. The mother whom she had idolised, and of whom she always remained excessively fond, appears to have been something of a termagant in her later years. The heavy troubles of her life had aggravated one of those irascible and uncontrollable tempers that can only be soothed by superior violence. Aurore, saddened, gentle, and submissive, only exasperated her. Her fitful affection and fitful rages combined to make her daughter's life miserable, and to incline the girl unconsciously to look over-favourably on any recognised mode of escape that should present itself.

A long visit to the country-house of some friends near Melun, was hailed as a real relief by both. Here there were young people, and plenty of cheerful society. Aurore became like one of the family, and her mother was persuaded to allow her to prolong her stay indefinitely. Among the new acquaintance she

formed whilst on this visit was one that decided her future.

M. Casimir Dudevant was a young man on terms of intimacy with her hosts, the Duplessis family. From the first he was struck by Mdlle. Dupin, who on his further acquaintance was not otherwise than pleased with him. The sequel, before long, came in an offer of marriage on his part, which she accepted with the approval of her friends.

He was seven-and-twenty, had served in the army, and studied for the law; but had expectations which promised an independence. His father, Colonel Dudevant, a landed proprietor in Gascony, whose marriage had proved childless, had acknowledged Casimir, though illegitimate, and made him his heir. It was reckoned not a brilliant *parti* for the *châtelaine* of Nohant, but a perfectly eligible one. It was not a *mariage de convenance*; the young people had chosen freely. Still less was it a love match. Romantic sentiment—counted out of place in such arrangements by the society they belonged to—seems not to have been dreamed of on either side. But they had arranged it for themselves, which to Aurore would naturally seem, as indeed it was, an improvement on the usual mode of procedure, according to which the burden of choice would have rested with her guardians. It was a *mariage de raison* founded, as she and he believed, on mutual friendliness; in reality on a total and fatal ignorance of each other's

characters, and probably, on Aurore's side, of her own as well. She was only just eighteen and had a wretched home.

The match was sanctioned by their parents, respectively. In September 1822, Aurore Dupin became Madame Dudevant, and shortly afterwards she and her husband established themselves at Nohant, there to settle down to quiet country life.

If tranquillity did not bring all the happiness that was expected, it was at least unbroken by such positive trials as those to come, and whatever was lacking to Madame Dudevant's felicity she forgot for a while in her joy over the birth of her son Maurice, in the summer of 1823—a son for whom more than ordinary treasures of maternal affection were in store, and who, when his childhood was past, was to become and remain until the time of her death a sure consolation and compensation to her for the troubles of her life.

The first two years after her marriage were spent almost without interruption in the still monotony of Nohant. "We live here as quietly as possible," she writes to her mother in June 1825, "seeing very few people, and occupying ourselves with rural cares." That absolute dependence on each other's society that might have had its charm for a really well-assorted couple was, however, not calculated to prolong any illusions that might exist as to the perfect harmony of their dispositions. Already in the summer of 1824

the Dudevants had sought a change from seclusion in a long visit to their friends the Duplessis, after which they rented a villa in the environs of Paris for a short while. The spring found them back at Nohant, and the summer of 1825 was marked by a tour to the Pyrenees, undertaken in concert with some old schoolfellows of Aurore's, two sisters, who with their father were starting for Cauterets. The pleasure of girlish friendships renewed gave double charm to the trip, and her delight in the mountain scenery knew no bounds.

"I am in such a state of enthusiasm about the Pyrenees," she writes to her mother, "that I shall dream and talk of nothing but mountains and torrents, caves and precipices, all the rest of my life." She joined eagerly in every excursion on foot and horseback, but even moderate feats of mountaineering, such as are now expected of the quietest English lady-tourists by their husbands and brothers, were then deemed startlingly eccentric, and got her into fresh trouble on this head.

Her letters and the fragments of her journal kept during this time, and in which she tried to commit to paper her impressions, whilst fresh and vivid, of the Pyrenees, show the same peculiar descriptive power that distinguished her novels—that art of seizing grand general effects together with picturesque detail and depicting them in a simple and straightforward manner,

in which she was an adept. It must be added that the diffuseness which characterises her fiction, also pervades her correspondence. Neither can be adequately represented by extracts. Her composition is like a gossamer web, that must be shown in its entirety, as to split it up is to destroy it.

The ensuing winter and spring were passed agreeably in visits with her husband to his family at Nérac, Gascony, and to friends in the neighbourhood. In the summer of 1826 their wanderings ended. Once more they settled down at Nohant, where Madame Dudevant, except for a few brief absences on visits to friends, or to health resorts in the vicinity, remained stationary for the next four years, during which her after-destiny was unalterably shaping itself.

It is perfectly idle to speculate on what might have happened had her lot in marriage turned out a fortunate one, or had she married for love, or had the moral character of the partner of her life preserved any solid claim on her respect, since the contrary was unhappily the case. Their situation, no doubt, was anomalous. In the young girl of barely eighteen, country-bred and intellectually immature, whom M. Dudevant had chosen to marry, who could have discerned one of the greatest poetical geniuses and most powerful minds of the century? Some commiseration might *à priori* be felt for the petty squire's son who had taken the hand of the petty country-heiress, promising him-

self, no doubt, a comfortable jog-trot existence in the ordinary groove, to discover in after years that he was mated with the most remarkable woman that had made herself heard of in the literary world since Sappho! But he remained fatally blind to the nature of the development that was taking place under his eyes, preserving to the last the serenest contempt for his wife's intelligence. Her large mind and enthusiastic temperament sought in vain for moral sympathy from a narrow common spirit, and in proportion as her faculties unfolded, increasing disparity between them brought increasing estrangement. Such a strong artist-nature may require for its expansion an amount of freedom not easily compatible with domestic happiness. But of real domestic happiness she never had a fair chance, and for a time the will to make the best of her lot as it was cast appears not to have been wanting.

The Dudevants, after their return home in 1826, began to mix more freely in such society as La Châtre and the environs afforded, and at certain seasons there was no lack of provincial gaieties. Aurore Dudevant all her life long was quite indifferent to what she has summarily dismissed as "the silly vanities of finery"—"*Souffrir pour être belle*" was what from her girlhood she declined to do. Regard for the brightness of her eyes, her complexion, the whiteness of her hands, the shape of her foot, never made her sacrifice her midnight study, her walks in the sunshine, or her good country

sabots for the rough lanes of Berry. "To live under glass, in order not to get tanned, or chapped, or faded before the time, is what I have always found impossible," she for her part has acknowledged. And she cared very moderately for general society. She writes to her mother in spring 1826: "It is not the thing of all others that reposes, or even that amuses me best; still there are obligations in this life, which one must take as they come." She was not yet two-and-twenty, and carnival-tide with its social "obligations" in the form of balls and receptions was not unwelcome. They snatched her away from her increasing depression. She writes of these diversions to her mother in a lively strain, describing how one ball was kept up till nine o'clock the next day, how every Sunday morning the *curé* preaches against dancing, but in the evening the dance goes on in despite of him—how this cross *curé* is not their own parish *curé* of St. Chartier,—a very old friend and a "character," who, when Madame Dudevant was five-and-thirty, used to say of her, "Aurore is a child I have always been fond of." "As for him, if only he were sixty years younger," she adds, "I would undertake to make him dance himself if I set about it." Then follows an amusing sketch of a rustic bridal, the double marriage of two members of the Nohant establishment:

The wedding-feast came off in our coach-houses—there was dinner in one, dancing in the other The splendour was such as you ma

imagine: three tallow candle-ends by way of illumination, lots of home-made wine for refreshment; the orchestra consisting of a bagpipe and a hurdy-gurdy, the noisiest and, therefore, the best appreciated in the country-side. We invited some friends over from La Châtre, and made fools of ourselves in a hundred thousand ways; as, for instance, dressing up as peasants in the evening and disguising ourselves so well as not to recognise each other. Madame Duplessis was charming in a red petticoat; Ursule, in a blue blouse and a big hat, was a most comical fellow; Casimir, got up as a beggar, had some halfpence given him in all good faith; Stephane, whom I think you know, as a spruce peasant, made believe to have been drinking, stumbled against our *sous-préfet* and accosted him—he is a nice fellow, and was just going to depart when all of a sudden he recognised us. Well, it was a most farcical evening, and would have amused you I will engage. Perhaps you, too, would have been tempted to put on the country-cap, and I will answer for it that there would not have been a pair of black eyes to compete with yours.

In other letters, written in a vein of charming good-humour, her facility and spirit are shown in her treatment of trivial incidents, or sketches of local characters, as this, for example, of an ancient female servant in her employ:

The strangest old woman in the world—active, industrious, clean, and faithful, but an unimaginable grumbler. She grumbles by day, and I think by night, when asleep. She grumbles whilst making the butter, she grumbles when feeding the poultry, she grumbles even at her meals. She grumbles at other people, and when she is alone she grumbles at herself. I never meet her without asking how her grumbling is getting on, and she grumbles away more than ever.

And elsewhere she has her fling at the little squabbles and absurdities of provincial society, the "sets" and petty distinctions, giving a humorous relation of the collapse of her well-meaning efforts, in conjunction with friends at the *sous-préfecture,* to do away with

some of these caste prejudices, of the horror and indignation created in the oligarchy of La Châtre by the apparition of an inoffensive music-master and his wife at the *sous-préfet's* reception, horror so great that on the next occasion, the *salon* of the official was unfurnished with guests, except for the said music-master and the Dudevants themselves. She wrote a poetical skit to commemorate the incident, which created great amusement among her friends.

In the autumn, 1828, her daughter Solange was born. The care of her two children, to whom she was devoted, occupied her seriously. Maurice's education was beginning, a fresh inducement to her to study that she might be better able to superintend his instruction. His least indisposition put her into a fever of anxiety. Her own health during all these years had repeatedly given cause for alarm. Symptoms of chest-disease showed themselves, but afterwards disappeared, her constitutional vigour triumphing in the end over complaints which seem to a great extent to have been of a nervous order. Meantime her domestic horizon was becoming overcast at many points.

Her brother Hippolyte Chatiron, now married, came with his family to settle in the neighbourhood, and spent some time at Nohant. He had fallen into the fatal habit of drinking, in which he was joined by M. Dudevant to-

the degradation of his habits and, it would be charitable to suppose, to the confusion of his intelligence. This grave ill came to make an open break in the household calm, hitherto undisturbed on the surface. Low company and its brutalising influences were tending to bring about a state of things to which the most patient of wives might find it hard to submit. A rôle of complete self-effacement was not one it was in her power long to sustain, and the utter moral solitude into which she was thrown consolidated those forces inclining her to the extreme of self-assertion. For together with trials without came the growing sense of superiority, the *ennui* and unrest springing from mental faculties with insufficient outlet and, moreover, denied the very shadow of appreciation at home, where she saw the claim to her deference and allegiance co-exist with a repudiation she resented of all idea of the reciprocity of such engagements.

She had voluntarily handed over the management of her property—the revenue of which was hardly proportionate to the necessary expenses and required careful economy—to her husband, an arrangement which left her, even for pocket-money, dependent on him. She now set herself to devise some means of adding to her resources by private industry. The more ambitious project of securing by her own exertions a separate maintenance for herself and her children would at this time have seemed chimerical, but it

haunted her as a dream long before it took definite shape.

It was not in literature that she first fancied she saw her way to earning an independent income. She had begun to make amateur essays in novel-writing, but was as dissatisfied with them as with the compositions of her childhood, and with a religious novelette she had produced whilst in the convent, and speedily committed to the flames. Again, alluding to her attempts, in 1825, at descriptions of the Pyrenees, she says: "I was not capable then of satisfying myself by what I wrote, for I finished nothing, and did not even acquire a taste for writing."

But she had dabbled in painting, and remained fond of it. "The finest of the arts," she calls it, writing to her mother in 1830, "and the most pleasant, as a life-occupation, whether taken up for a profession, or for amusement merely. If I had real talent, I should consider such a lot the finest in the world." But neither did the decoration of fans and snuff-boxes nor the production of little water-colour likenesses of her children and friends, beyond which her art did not go, promise anything brilliant in the way of remuneration.

In her circle of friends at La Châtre—old family friends who had known her all her life—were those who had recognised and admired her superior ability. Here, too, she met more than one young spirit with literary aspirations, and one, at least, M. Jules San-

deau, who was afterwards to achieve distinguished literary success. The desire to go and do likewise came and took hold of her, together with the conviction of her capability to make her mark. However discontented with her essays in novel-writing hitherto, she began to be conscious she was on the right track. The Revolution of July 1830 had just been successfully accomplished, and new hopes and ambitions for the world in general, and their own country in particular, lent a stimulus to the intellectual activity of the youth of France—a movement too strong not to make itself felt, even in Berry.

The state of things at Nohant for the last two years had, as we have seen, been tending rather to stifle than to keep alive any hesitation or compunction Madame Dudevant might have felt at breaking openly from her present condition. In a letter, dated October 1830, to her son's private tutor, M. Boucoiran, who had then been a year under their roof in that capacity, she remarks, significantly:

> You often wonder at my mobility of temper, my flexible character. What would become of me without this power of self-distraction? You know all in my life, and you ought to understand that but for that happy turn of mind which makes me quickly forget a sorrow, I should be disagreeable and perpetually withdrawn into myself, useless to others, insensible to their affection.

The distance between herself and her husband had, indeed, been widening until now the sole real link between them was their joint love for the children.

No pretence of mutual affection existed any longer. Madame Dudevant's feeling seems to have been of indifference merely; M. Dudevant's of dislike, mingled, probably, with a little fear. It appears that he committed to paper his sentiments on the subject, and that this document, ostensibly intended by him not to be opened till after his death, was found and perused by his wife. It was the provocation thus occasioned her, and the certainty thus acquired of her husband's aversion to her society, that brought matters to a climax; so, at least, she asserted in the heat of the moment. But nothing, we imagine, could long have deferred her next step, strange and venturesome though it was. Violent in acting on a determination when taken, after the manner, as she observes, of those whose determinations are slow in forming, she declared her intentions to her husband, and obtained his consent to her plan.

According to this singular arrangement she was to be permitted to spend every alternate three months in Paris, where she proposed to try her fortune with her pen. She looked forward to having her little girl to be there with her as soon as she was comfortably settled, supposing the experiment to succeed. For half the year she would continue to reside, as hitherto, at Nohant, so as not to be long separated from her son, who was old enough to miss her, and to part from whom, on any terms, cost her dear. But he was to be sent to school in two years, and for the meantime she

had secured for him the care and services of M. Boucoiran, whom she thoroughly trusted.

Her husband was to allow her £120 a year out of her fortune, and on condition that the allowance should not be exceeded, he left her at liberty to get on as she chose, abstaining from further interference.

It seems obvious that this compromise, whilst postponing, could only render more inevitable a future separation on less amicable terms, though neither appear to have realised it at the time. Madame Dudevant can have had no motive to blind her in the matter beyond her desire, in detaching herself from her present position, not to disconnect her life from that of her children. The freedom she demanded it was probably too late to deny. Those about her, her husband and M. Chatiron who, with his family, was temporarily domesticated at Nohant, and who so far supported her as to offer her the loan of rooms held by him in Paris, for the first part of her stay, thought her resolution but a caprice. And viewed by the light of her subsequent success it is hard now to realise the boldness of an undertaking whose consequences, had it failed, must have been humiliating and disastrous. She had no practical knowledge of the world, had received no artistic training, and enjoyed none of the advantages of intellectual society. But she had extraordinary courage, spirit, and energy, springing no doubt from a latent sense of extraordinary powers, almost matured, though as yet

but half-manifest. So much she knew of herself, and states modestly: "I had discovered that I could write quickly, easily, and for long at a time without fatigue; that my ideas, torpid in my brain, woke up and linked themselves together deductively in the flow of the pen; that in my life of seclusion, I had observed a good deal, and understood pretty well the characters I had chanced to come across, and that, consequently, I knew human nature well enough to describe it." A most moderate estimate, in which, however, she had yet to to convince people that she was not self-deceived.

CHAPTER III.

DÉBUT IN LITERATURE.

In the first days of January 1831, the Rubicon was passed. The step, though momentous in any case to Madame Dudevant, was one whose ultimate consequences were by none less anticipated than by herself, when to town she came, still undecided whether her future destiny were to decorate screens and tea-caddies, or to write books, but resolved to give the literary career a trial.

For actual subsistence she had her small fixed allowance from home; for credentials she was furnished with an introduction or two to literary men from her friends in the country who had some appreciation, more or less vague, of her intellectual powers. Though courageous and determined she was far from self-confident; she asked herself if she might not be mistaking a mere fancy for a faculty, and her first step was to seek the

opinion of some experienced authority as to her talent and chances.

M. de Kératry, a popular novelist, to whom she was recommended, spoke his mind to her without restraint. It was to the crushing effect that a woman ought not to write at all. Her sex, Madame Dudevant was informed, can have no proper place in literature whatsoever. M. Delatouche, proprietor of the *Figaro*, poet and novelist besides, and cousin of her old and intimate friends the Duvernets, of La Châtre, was a shade more encouraging, even so far committing himself as to own that, if she would not let herself be disgusted by the struggles of a beginner, there might be a distant possibility for her of making some sixty pounds a year by her pen. Such specimens of her fiction as she submitted to him he condemned without appeal, but he encouraged her to persevere in trying to improve upon them, and advised her well in advising her to avoid imitation of any school or master, and fearlessly to follow her own bent.

Meantime he took her on to the staff of his paper, then in its infancy and comparative obscurity. Journalism however was the department of literature least suited to her capabilities, and her fellow-contributors, though so much less highly gifted than Madame Dudevant, excelled her easily in the manufacture of leaders and paragraphs to order. To produce an article of a given length, on a given subject, within a given time,

was for her the severest of ordeals; here her exuberant facility itself was against her. She would exhaust the space allotted to her, and find herself obliged to break off just at the point when she felt herself "beginning to begin." But she justly valued this apprenticeship as a professional experience, bringing her into direct relations with the literary world she was entering as a perfect stranger. Once able to devote herself entirely to composition and to live for her work, she found her calling begin to assert itself despotically. In a letter to a friend, M. Duteil, at La Châtre, dated about six weeks after her arrival in Paris, she writes:—

If I had foreseen half the difficulties that I find, I should not have undertaken this enterprise. Well, the more I encounter the more I am resolved to proceed. Still, I shall soon be returning home again, perhaps without having succeeded in launching my boat, but with hopes of doing better another time, and with plans of working harder than ever.

Three weeks later we find her writing to her son's tutor, M. Boucoiran, in the same strain:—

I am more than ever determined to follow the literary career. In spite of the disagreeables I often meet with, in spite of days of sloth and fatigue that come and interrupt my work, in spite of the more than humble life I lead here, I feel that henceforward my existence is filled. I have an object, a task, better say it at once, a passion. The profession of a writer is a violent one, and, so to speak, indestructible. Once let it take possession of your wretched head, you cannot stop. I have not been successful, my work was thought too unreal by those whom I asked for advice.

But still she persisted, providing, as best she could, "copy" for the *Figaro*, at seven francs a column, and

trying the experiment of literary collaboration, working at fictions and magazine articles, the joint productions of herself and her friend and fellow-student, Jules Sandeau, who wrote for the *Revue de Paris.* It was under his name that these compositions appeared, Madame Dudevant, in these first trial-attempts, being undesirous to bring hers before the public.

"I have no time to write home," she pleads, petitioning M. Boucoiran for news from the country, "but I like getting letters from Nohant, it rests my heart and my head."

And alluding to her approaching temporary return thither, in accordance with the terms of her agreement with M. Dudevant, she writes to M. Charles Duvernet:—

I long to get back to Berry, for I love my children more than all besides, and, but for the hope of becoming one of these days more useful to them with the scribe's pen than with the house-keeper's needle, I should not leave them for so long. But in spite of innumerable obstacles I mean to take the first steps in this thorny career.

In her case it was really the first step only that cost dear; whilst against the annoyances with which, as a new comer, she had to contend, there was ample compensation to set in the novel interests of the intellectual, political, and artistic world stirring around her. Country life and peasant life she had had the opportunity of studying from her youth up; of middle-class society she had sufficient experience; she counted elatives and friends among the *noblesse,* and had

moved in those charmed circles; but the republic of art and letters, to which by nature and inclination she emphatically belonged, was a land of promise first opened up to her now. She was eager and impatient to deprovincialize herself.

In the art galleries of the Louvre, at the theatre and the opera, in the daily interchange of ideas on all kinds of topics with her little circle of intelligent acquaintance, her mind grew richer by a thousand new impressions and enjoyments, and rapidly took fresh strength together with fresh knowledge. The heavy practical obstacles that interfere with such self-education on the part of one of her sex were seriously aggravated in her case by her narrow income. How she surmounted them is well known; assuming on occasion a disguise which, imposing on all but the initiated, enabled her everywhere to pass for a collegian of sixteen, and thus to go out on foot in all weathers, at all hours, alone if necessary, unmolested and unobserved, in theatre or restaurant, boulevard or reading-room. In defence of her adoption of this strange measure, she pleads energetically the perishable nature of feminine attire in her day,—a day before double-soles or ulsters formed part of a lady's wardrobe,—its incompatibility with the incessant going to and fro which her busy life required, the exclusion of her sex from the best part of a Paris theatre, and so forth; the ineffable superiority of a costume which, economy and comfort apart, secured

her equal independence with her men competitors in the race, and identical advantages as to the rapid extension of her field of observation. The practice, though never carried on by her to such an extent as very commonly asserted, was one to which she did not hesitate to resort now and then in later years, as a mere measure of convenience—a measure the world will only tolerate in the Rosalinds and Violas of the stage. The career of George Sand was, like her nature, entirely exceptional, and any attempt to judge it in any other light lands us in hopeless moral contradictions. She had extraordinary incentives to prompt her to extraordinary actions, which may be condemned or excused, but which there could be no greater mistake than to impute to ordinary vulgar motives. It must also be remembered that fifty years ago, the female art student had no recognised existence. She was shut out from that modicum of freedom and of practical advantages it were arbitrary to deny, and which may now be enjoyed by any earnest art aspirant in almost any great city. However unjustifiable the proceeding resorted to for a time by George Sand and Rosa Bonheur may be held to be, it cannot possibly be said they had no motive for it but a fantastic one.

Writing to her mother from Nohant, whither she had returned in April for a length of time as agreed, Madame Dudevant speaks out characteristically in defence of her love of independence :—

I am far from having that love of pleasure, that need of amuse-

ment with which you credit me. Society, sights, finery, are not what I want,—you only are under this mistake about me,—it is liberty. To be all alone in the street and able to say to myself, I shall dine at four or at seven, according to my good pleasure; I shall go to the Tuileries by way of the Luxembourg instead of going by the Champs Elysées; this is what amuses me far more than silly compliments and stiff drawing-room assemblies.

Such audacious self-emancipation, she was well aware, must estrange her from her friends of her own sex in the upper circles of Parisian society, and she anticipated this by making no attempt to renew such connections. For the moment she thought only of taking the shortest, and, as she judged, the only way for a "torpid country wife," like herself, to acquire the freedom of action and the enlightenment she needed. Those most nearly related to her offered no opposition. It was otherwise with her mother-in-law, the *baronne* Dudevant, with whom she had a passage of arms at the outset on the subject of her literary campaign, here disapproved *in toto*.

"Is it true," enquired this lady, "that it is your intention to *print books*?"

"Yes, madame."

"Well, I call that an odd notion!"

"Yes, madame."

"That is all very good and very fine, but I hope you are not going to put the name that I bear on the *covers of printed books*?"

"Oh, certainly not, madame, there is no danger."

The liberty to which other considerations were

required to give way was certainly complete enough. The beginning of July found her back at work in the capital. On the Quai St. Michel—a portion of the Seine embankment facing the towers of Notre Dame the Sainte Chapelle, and other picturesque monuments of ancient Paris—she had now definitely installed herself in modest lodgings on a fifth story. Accepted and treated as a comrade by a little knot of fellow *literati* and colleagues on the *Figaro,* two of whom—Jules Sandeau and Félix Pyat—were from Berry, like herself; and with Delatouche, also a Berrichon, for their head-master, she served thus singularly her brief apprenticeship to literature and experience;—sharing with the rest both their studies and their relaxations, dining with them at cheap restaurants, frequenting clubs, studios, and theatres of every degree; the youthful effervescence of her student-friends venting itself in such collegians' pranks as parading deserted quarters of the town by moonlight, in the small hours, chaunting lugubrious strains to astonish the shopkeepers. The only great celebrity whose acquaintance she had made was Balzac, himself the prince of eccentrics. Although he did not encourage Madame Dudevant's literary ambition, he showed himself kindly disposed towards her and her young friends, and she gives some amusing instances that came under her notice of his oddities. Thus once after a little Bohemian dinner at his lodgings in

the Rue Cassini, he insisted on putting on a new and magnificent dressing-gown, of which he was exceedingly vain, to display to his guests, of whom Madame Dudevant was one; and not satisfied therewith, must needs go forth, thus accoutred, to light them on their walk home. All the way he continued to hold forth to them about four Arab horses, which he had not got yet, but meant to get soon, and of which, though he never got them at all, he firmly believed himself to have been possessed for some time. "He would have escorted us thus," says Madame Dudevant, "from one extremity of Paris to another, if we had let him."

Twice again before the end of the year, faithful to her original intentions, we find her returning to her place as mistress of the house at Nohant, occupying herself with her children, and working at the novel *Indiana*, which was to create her reputation the following year.

Meantime, a novelette, *La Prima Donna*, the outcome of the literary collaboration with Jules Sandeau, had found its way into a magazine, the *Revue de Paris*; and was followed by a longer work of fiction, of the same double authorship, entitled *Rose et Blanche*, published under Sandeau's *nom de plume* of Jules Sand.

This literary partnership was not to last long, and to-day the novel will be found omitted in the list of the respective works of its authors. Its perusal will hardly repay the curious. The powerful genius of Madame Dudevant, the elegant talent of the author

of *Mdlle. de la Seiglière*, are mostly conspicuous by their absence in *Rose et Blanche*, or *La Comédienne et la Réligieuse*, an imitative attempt, and not a happy one, in the style of fiction then in vogue.

Madame Dudevant had stepped into the literary world at the moment of the most ardent activity of the Romantic movement. The new school was on the point of achieving its earliest signal triumphs. Victor Hugo's first poems had just been followed by the dramas *Hernani* and *Marion Delorme*. Dumas' *Antony* was drawing crowded and enthusiastic houses. A few months before the publication of *Rose et Blanche* appeared *Notre Dame de Paris*. The passion for innovation which had seized on all the younger school of writers was leading many astray. The strange freaks of Hugo's genius had, to quote Madame Dudevant's own expression, excited a "ferocious appetite" for whatever was most outrageous, and set taste, precedent, and probability most flatly at defiance. From those aberrations into which the great master's imitators had been betrayed Madame Dudevant's fine art-instincts were calculated to preserve her; but she had not yet learnt to trust to them implicitly.

Rose et Blanche, though containing many clever passages—waifs and strays of shrewd observation, description and character analysis,—is in the main ill-conceived, ill-constructed, and unreal. The two authors have sacrificed their individualities in a mistaken effort to

follow the fashion's lead, resulting in a most ineffective compound of tameness and sensationalism. Amazing adventures are undergone by each heroine before she is one-and-twenty. Angels of innocence, they are doomed to have their existences crushed out by the heartless conduct of man, Blanche expiring of dismay almost as soon as she is led from the altar, Rose burying herself and her despair in a convent. The then favourite heroes of romance were of the French Byronic type—young men of fortune who have exhausted life before they are five-and-twenty, whose minds are darkened by haunting memories of some terrific crime, but who are none the less capable of all the virtues and great elevation of sentiment on occasion. None of these requisitions are left unfulfilled by the unamiable hero of *Rose et Blanche,* a work which did little to advance the fortunes of its authors, and whose intrinsic merits offer little warrant for dragging it out of the oblivion into which it has been suffered to drop.

To escape the influences of the literary revolution everywhere then triumphant was of course impossible. To make them serve her individual genius instead of enslaving her individuality was all Madame Dudevant needed to learn. Her friend Balzac had done this for himself, suiting his genius to the period without any sacrifice of originality. Although not yet at the height of his fame he had produced many most

successful works, and Madame Dudevant, according to her own account, derived great profit from the study of his method, although with no inclination to follow in his direction. Yet he afterwards observed to her, "Our two roads lead to the same goal."

Rose et Blanche, though little noticed by the public, brought a publisher to the door, one Ernest Dupuy, with an order for another novel by the same authors. *Indiana* was ready-written, and came in response to the demand. But as Sandeau had had no hand whatever in this composition, the signature had of course to be varied. The publisher wishing to connect the new novel with its predecessor it was decided to alter the prefix only. She fixed on George, as representative of Berry, the land of husbandmen; and George Sand thus became the pseudonym of the author of *Indiana,* a pseudonym whose origin imaginative critics have sought far afield and some have discovered in her alleged sympathy with Kotzebue's murderer, Karl Sand, and political assassination in general! Its assumption was to inaugurate a new era in her life.

In the last days of April, 1832, appeared *Indiana,* by George Sand. "I took," says Madame Dudevant, in her account of the transaction, "the 1,200 francs paid me by the publisher, which to me were a little fortune, hoping he would see his money back again." She had recently returned from one of her periodical visits to Nohant, accompanied this time by her little

girl, whom the progress already achieved enabled her now to take into her charge, and was living very quietly and studiously in her humble establishment on the Quai St. Michel, when she awoke to find herself famous.

Her success, for which indeed there had been nothing to prepare her—neither flattery of friends, nor vain-glorious ambition within herself—was immediate and conclusive. Whatever differences of opinion might exist about the book, critics agreed in recognising there the revelation of a new writer of extraordinary power. "One of those masters who have been gifted with the enchanter's wand and mirror," wrote Sainte-Beuve, a few months later, when he did not hesitate to compare the young author to Madame de Staël. The novel of sentimental analysis, a style in which George Sand is unsurpassed, was then a fresh and promising field. *Indiana,* without the aid of marvellous incidents, startling crimes, or iniquitous mysteries, rivetted the attention of its readers as firmly as the most thrilling tales of adventure and horror. It is a "soul's tragedy," and that is all—the love-tragedy vulgarised since by repeated treatment by inferior novelists, of a romantic, sensitive, passionate, high-natured girl, hopelessly ill-mated with a somewhat tyrannical and stupid, yet not entirely ill-disposed old colonel, and exposed to the seductions of a Lovelace—the truth about whose unloveable character, in its profound and heartless

egoism, first bursts upon her at the moment when, maddened by brutal insult, she is driven to claim the generous devotion he has proffered a thousand times. Side by side with the ideal of selfishness, Raymon, stands in contrast the ideally chivalrous Ralph, Indiana's despised cousin, who, loving her disinterestedly and in silence, has watched over her as a guardian-friend to the last, and does save her ultimately. The florid descriptions, the high-flown strains of emotion, which now strike as blemishes in the book, were counted beauties fifty years since; and even to-day, when reaction has brought about an extreme distaste for emotional writing, they cannot conceal the superior ability of the novelist. The sentiment, however extravagantly worded, is genuine and spontaneous, and has the true ring of passionate conviction. The characters are vividly, if somewhat coarsely drawn and contrasted, the scenes graphic; every page is coloured by fervid imagination, and despite some violations of probability in the latter portion, out of keeping artistically with the natural character of the rest of the book, the whole has the strength of that unity and completeness of conception which is the distinguishing stamp of a genius of the first order. The *entrain* of the style is irresistible. It was written, she tells us, *tout d'un jet*, under the force of a stimulus from within. Ceasing to counterfeit the manner of anyone, or to consult the exigencies of the book-market, she for the

first time ventures to be herself, responsible for the inspiration and the mode of expression adopted.

The papers spoke of the new novel in high tones of praise, the public read it with avidity. The authorship, for a time, continued to perplex people. In spite of the masculine pseudonym, certain feminine qualities, niceties of perception and tenderness, were plainly recognised in the work, but the possibility that so vigorous and well-executed a composition could come from a feminine hand was one then reckoned scarcely admissible. Even among those already in the secret were sceptics who questioned the author's power to sustain her success, since nearly everybody, it is said, can produce one good novel.

"The success of *Indiana* has thrown me into dismay," writes Madame Dudevant, in July 1832, to M. Charles Duvernet, at La Châtre. "Till now, I thought my writing was without consequence, and would not merit the slightest attention. Fate has decreed otherwise. The unmerited admiration of which I have become the object must be justified." And *Valentine* was already in progress; and its publication, not many months after *Indiana,* to be a conclusive answer to the challenge.

The season of 1832, in which George Sand made her *début* in literature, was marked, in Paris, by public events of the most tragic character. In the spring, the cholera made its appearance, and struck panic into

the city. Six people died in the house where Madame Dudevant resided, but neither she nor any of her friends were attacked. She was next to be a witness of political disturbances equally terrible. The disappointment felt by the Liberals at the results of the Revolution of 1830, and of the establishment of Louis Philippe's Government, upon which such high hopes had been founded, was already beginning to assert itself in secret agitation, and in sanguinary street insurrections, such as that of June, 1832, sanguinarily repressed. Madame Dudevant at this time had no formulated political creed, and political subjects were those least attractive to her. But though born in the opposite camp she felt all her natural sympathies incline to the Republican side. They were further intensified by the scenes of which she was an eye-witness, and which roused a similar feeling even among anti-revolutionists. Thus Heine, in giving account of the struggle mentioned above, and speaking of the enthusiasts who sacrificed their lives in this desperate demonstration, exclaims, "I am, by God! no Republican. I know that if the Republicans conquer they will cut my throat, and all because I don't admire all they admire; but yet the tears came into my eyes as I trod those places still stained with their blood. I had rather I, and all my fellow-moderates, had died than those Republicans."

Amid such disturbing influences it is not surprising

that we find her complaining in the letter last quoted that her work makes no progress; but the lost time was made up for by redoubled industry during her summer visit to Nohant.

In the autumn appeared *Valentine*. This second novel not only confirmed the triumph won by the first, but was a surer proof of the writer's calibre, as showing what she could do with simpler materials. Here, encouraged by success, she had ventured to take her stand entirely on her own ground—dispensing even with an incidental trip to the tropics, which, in *Indiana*, strikes as a misplaced concession to the prevalent craze for Oriental colouring—and to lay the scene in her own obscure province of Berry, her first descriptions of which show her rare comprehension of the poetry of landscape. Like *Indiana*, *Valentine* is a story of the affections; like *Indiana*, it is a domestic tragedy, of which the girl-heroine is the victim of a pernicious system that makes of marriage, in the first instance, a mere commercial speculation. Indeed, the extreme painfulness of the story would render the whole too repulsive but for the charm of the setting, which relieves it not a little, and a good deal of humour in the treatment of the minor characters, notably the eighteenth century *marquise*, and the Lhéry family of peasant-*parvenus*. The personages are drawn with more finish than those in *Indiana*; the tone is more natural in its pitch. It is the work of one who finds in every-day

observation, as well as in such personal emotions as come but once in a life-time, the inspiration that smaller talents can derive from the latter alone.

In both her consummate art, or rather natural gift of the art of narrative, is the mainstay of the fabric her imagination has reared. That incomparable style of hers is like some magic fairy-ring, that bears the wearer, safe and victorious, through manifold perils—perils these of prolixity, exaggeration, and disdain of careful constructi on. Both *Indiana* and *Valentine*, moreover, contain scenes and passages offensive to English taste, but it is impossible fairly to criticise the fiction of a land where freer expression in speech and in print than with us is habitually recognised and practised, from our own standpoint of literary decorum. It was not for this feature that French criticism had already begun to charge her books with dangerous tendencies (thus contributing largely to noise her fame abroad), as breathing rebellion against the laws of present society; charges which, so far as *Indiana* and *Valentine* are concerned, had, as is now generally admitted, but little foundation. Each is the story of an unhappy marriage, but there is no attempt whatever to throw contempt on existing institutions, or to propound any theory, unless it be the idea—no heresy or novelty in England at least—that marriage, concluded without love on either side, is fraught with special dangers to the wife, whose happiness is bound up with her affections. It was the

bold and uncompromising manner in which this plain fact was brought forward, the energy of the protest against a real social abuse, which moved some critics to sound a war-cry for which, as yet, no just warrant had been given.

Besides these two novels, containing full proof of her genius, if not of its highest employment, there appeared late in 1832 that remarkable novelette, *La Marquise,* revealing fresh qualities of subtle penetration and clear analysis. The flexibility of her imagination, the variety in her modes of its application, form an essential characteristic of her work. Not by any single novel, nor, indeed, by half-a-dozen taken at random, can she be adequately represented.

When in the winter of 1832 Madame Sand returned with her little girl to Paris after spending the autumn as usual at Nohant, it was to rather more comfortable quarters, on the Quai Malplaquet. The rapid sale of her books was placing her in comparatively easy circumstances, and giving fresh spur to her activity. But her situation was transforming itself fast; the freedom of obscurity was lost to her for ever from the day when the unknown personage, George Sand, became the object of general curiosity—of curiosity redoubled in Paris by the rumours current there of her exceptional position, eccentric habits, and interesting personality.

The celebrated portrait of her by Eugène Delacroix was painted in the year 1833. It is a three-quarter

view, and represents her wearing her *quasi* masculine *redingote,* with broad *revers* and loosely-knotted silk neck-tie. Of somewhat later date is a highly interesting drawing by Calamatta, well-known by engravings; but of George Sand in her first youth no likeness unfortunately has been left to the world. She has been most diversely described by her different contemporaries. But that at this time she possessed real beauty is perfectly evident; for all that she denies it herself, and that, unlike most women, and nearly all Frenchwomen, she scorned to enhance it by an elaborated toilette. Heine, though he never professed himself one of her personal adorers, compares the beauty of her head to that of the Venus of Milo, saying, "It bears the stamp of ideality, and recalls the noblest remaining examples of Greek art." Her figure was somewhat too short, but her hands and feet were very small and beautifully shaped. His acquaintance with her dates from the early years of her literary triumphs, and his description is in harmony with Calamatta's presentation. She had dark curling hair, a beauty in itself, falling in profusion to her shoulders, well-formed features, pale olive-tinted complexion, the countenance expressive, the eyes dark and very fine, not sparkling, but mild and full of feeling. The face reminds us of the character of "Still Waters," attributed to the Aurore Dupin of fifteen by the Lady Superior of the English convent. Her voice was soft and muffled, and the sim-

plicity of her manner has been remarked on by those who sought her acquaintance, as a particular charm. Yet, like all reserved natures, she often failed to attract strangers at a first meeting. In general conversation she disappointed people, by not shining. Men and women, immeasurably her inferiors, surpassed her in ready wit and brilliant repartee. Her taciturnity in society has been somewhat ungenerously laid to a *parti pris.* She was one, it was said, who took all and gave nothing. That she was intentionally chary of her passing thoughts and impressions to those around her is however sufficiently disproved by her letters. Here she shows herself lavish of her mind to her correspondents. Conversation and composition necessitate a very different brain action, and her marvellous facility in writing seems really to have been accompanied with no corresponding readiness of speech and reply. Probably it was only, as she herself states, when she had a pen in her hand that her lethargic ideas would arise and flow in order as they should. And the need of self-expression felt by all those who have not the gift of communicating themselves fully and easily in speech or manner, a strong need in her case, from her having so much to express, was the spur that drove her to seek and find the mode of so doing in art.

Her silence in company certainly did not detract from her fascination upon a closer acquaintance. Of those who fell under the spell, the more fortunate

came at once to terms of friendship with her, which remained undisturbed for life. Thus of one among this numerous brotherhood, François Rollinat, with whom she would congratulate herself on having realised the perfection of such an alliance of minds, she could write when recording their friendship, then already a quarter of a century old, that it was still young as compared with some that she counted, and that dated from her childhood.

Others fell in love with her, and found her unresponsive. With some of these, jealousies and misunderstandings arose, and led to estrangements, for the most part but temporary. Yet the winner of her heart was scarcely to be envied. She was apt—she has herself thus expressed it—to see people through a prism of enthusiasm, and afterwards to recover her lucidity of judgment. Great, no doubt, was her power of self-illusion; it betrayed her into errors that have been unsparingly judged. For her power of calm and complete disillusion she was perhaps unique among women, and it is no wonder if mankind have found it hard to forgive.

CHAPTER IV.

LÉLIA.—ITALIAN JOURNEY.

It was less than two years since she had come up to the capital, to seek her fortunes there in literature. Aurore Dudevant, hereafter to be spoken of as George Sand (for she made her adopted name more her own than that she had borne hitherto, and became George Sand for her private friends as well as for the public), found herself raised to eminence among the eminent. And it was at an exceptionally brilliant epoch in French imaginative literature that the distinction had been won. Such a burst of talent as that which signalised the opening years of Louis Philippe's reign is unexampled in French literary history. With Hugo, Dumas, De Musset, Balzac, not to mention lesser stars, the author of *Indiana* and *Valentine*, although a woman, was acknowledged as worthy to rank. The artist in her, a disturbing element in her inner life which had driven her out of the spiritual

bondage and destitution of a petty provincial environment to secure for herself freedom and expansion, had justified the audacity of the move by a triumphant artistic success. From this time onward her artistic faculty dominated her life, often, probably, unknown to herself, an invincible force of instinct she obeyed, whilst assigning, in all good faith, other motives for her course of action, and for real or apparent inconsequences, that have been constantly misrepresented and misunderstood.

So sudden and abrupt a change would have turned all heads but the strongest. Publishers competed with one another to secure her next work. Buloz, proprietor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, engaged her to write regularly for his periodical, to which, for the next ten years, she never ceased to be a regular and extensive contributor. Although the scale of remuneration was not then very high she was clearly secure, so long as she allowed nothing to interfere with her literary work, of earning a sufficient income for her own needs. She had learnt the importance of pecuniary independence, and never pretended to despise the reward of her industry. To luxury she was indifferent, but the necessity of strict economy was a burden she was impatient of; she liked to have plenty to give away, and was always excessively liberal to the poor. Her little dwelling on the Quai Malplaquet was no longer the hermitage of an anonymous writer of no account. The great in art and letters, leading

critics, such as Sainte-Beuve and Gustave Planche, came eager to seek her acquaintance, and delighting to honour the obscure student of a year ago.

Writing to M. Boucoiran after her return to Paris in December 1832, she describes her altered position :—

All day long I am beset with visitors, who are not all entertaining It is a calamity of my profession, which I am partly obliged to bear. But in the evening I shut myself up with my pens and my ink, Solange, my piano, and a fire. With all these I pass some right pleasant hours. No noise but the sounds of a harp, coming I know not whence, and of the playing of a fountain under my window. This is highly poetical—pray don't make game of me!

There was another side to her success. Fame brought trials and annoyances that fell with double severity on her as a woman. Her door was besieged by a troop of professional beggars, impostors, impertinent idlers, and inquisitive newsmongers. Jealousy and ill-will, inevitably attendant on sudden good fortune such as hers, busied themselves with direct calumny and insidious misrepresentation. No statement so unfounded, so wildly improbable about her, but it obtained circulation and credit. Till the end of her life she remained the centre of a cloud of myths, many, to the present day, accepted as gospel. People insisted on identifying her with the heroines of her novels. Incidents, personal descriptions, nay, whole letters extracted from these novels will be found literally transcribed into alleged biographies of herself and her friends, as her own statement of matters of fact. Now, though the spirit of her life is strongly and faithfully

represented by her fiction taken as a whole, those who would read in any special novel the literal record of any of the special events of her existence cannot be too much on their guard. Whatever the material under treatment, George Sand must retouch, embellish, transform, artist-fashion, as her genius shall dictate, till often little resemblance is left between the original and the production it has done no more than suggest. Romance and reality are so fused together in these apparent outpourings of spirit that her nearest friends were at a loss how to separate them. As an actress into many a favourite part, so could she throw herself into her favourite characters; but seldom if ever will much warrant be found in actual fact for identifying these creations with their creatress.

How, indeed, could so many-sided a nature as hers be truly represented in a single novel? Her rare physical and mental energies enabled her to combine a life of masculine intellectual activity with the more highly emotional life of a woman, and with vigilance in her maternal cares. Maurice was placed in the spring of 1833 at the College Henri IV., at Paris; thus she had now both son and daughter near her, and watched indefatigably over them, their childish illnesses and childish amusements, their moral and intellectual training absorbing a large share of her time and attention. Heine, a friendly visitor at her house, says:—

I have often been present for hours whilst she gave her children

a lesson in French, and it is a pity that the whole of the French Academy could not have been present too, as it is quite certain that they might have derived great profit from it.

Not all the distractions of fame and work, of passionate pleasure or passionate sorrow, ever relaxed her active solicitude for the present and future welfare of her two young children. "They give me the only real joys of my life," she repeats again and again.

Lélia, begun immediately after *Valentine,* was published in the spring of 1833, and created an immense sensation. Hailed by her admirers as a sign of an accession of power, of power exerted in quite a new direction, it brought down on the writer's head a storm of hostile criticism, as a declared enemy of religion and domestic morality—enhancing her celebrity not a little.

Lélia, a lyrical novel—an outburst of poetical philosophy in prose, stands alone among the numerous productions of George Sand. Here she takes every sort of poetical license, in a work without the restrictions of poetic form which are the true conditions of so much latitude. "Manfred" and "Alastor" are fables not further removed from real life than is *Lélia.* The personages are like allegorical figures, emblematic of spiritual qualities on a grand scale, the scenes like the paradisiacal gardens that visited the fancy of Aurore Dupin when a child. There is no action. The interest is not in the characters and what they do, but in what they say. The declamatory style, then so popular, is one the

taste for which has so completely waned that *Lélia* will find comparatively few readers in the present day, fewer who will not find its perusal wearisome, none perhaps whose morality, however weak, will be seriously shaken by utterances ever and anon hovering on the perilous confines of the sublime and the ludicrous.

Lélia, a female Faust or Manfred, a mysterious muse-like heroine, who one night sleeps on the heathery mountain side, the next displays the splendour of a queen in palaces and fairy-like villas; her sorely tried and hapless lover Sténio, the poet, who pours forth odes to his own accompaniment on the harp, and lingers the night long among Alpine precipices brooding over the abyss; Trenmor, the returned gentleman convict and Apostle of the Carbonari, whose soul has been refreshed, made young and regenerated at the galleys; and the mad Irish priest Magnus, are impossible personages, inviting to easy ridicule, and neither wisdom nor folly from their lips is likely to beguile the ears of the present generation.

It is no novel, but a poetical essay, fantastically conceived and executed with the *sans gêne* of an improvisatore. For those who admire the genius of George Sand its interest as a psychological revelation remains unabated. Into *Lélia,* she owns, she put more of her real self than into any other of her books—of herself, that is, and her state of mind at the dawn of a period of moral disturbance and revolt. All must continue to

recognise there an extraordinary exhibition of poetical power and musical style. As a work of art George Sand has herself pronounced it absurd, yet she always cherished for it a special predilection, and, as will be seen, took the trouble to rewrite it some years later, when in a happier and healthier frame of mind than that which inspired this unique and most characteristic composition.

The note of despair struck in *Lélia,* the depth of bitter feeling, the capacity for mental and moral speculation and suffering it seemed to disclose, astounded many of her familiar acquaintance. "*Lélia* is a fancy-type," so writes to the author her friend and neighbour in Berry, Jules Néraud, an ardent naturalist, whose botanical and entomological pursuits she had often shared: "it is not like you—you who are merry, dance the *bourrée,* appreciate lepidoptera, do not despise puns, who are not a bad needle-woman, and make very good preserves. Is it possible you should have thought so much, felt so much, without anyone having any idea of it?"

Lélia was certainly the expression of a new phase in her mind's history, a moral crisis she could not escape, which was all the more severe for her having, as she remarks, reached her thirtieth year without having opened her eyes to the realities of life. Till the time of her coming to Paris, for very dearth of outward impressions she had lived chiefly in dreams, the life of all others most favourable to the prolonga-

tion of ignorance and credulity. The liberty and activity she had enjoyed for the last two years were fatal to Utopian theories.

It was not only the bitterness that springs from disenchantment in individuals, the sense of the miserable insufficiency of human love to satisfy her spiritual aspirations producing "that widely concluding unbelief which," as her sister in greatness has said, "we call knowledge of the world, but which is really disappointment in you and in me." George Sand was one to whom scepticism was intolerable. Pessimistic doctrines were fatal to her mind's equilibrium, and private experience and outward intellectual influences were driving her to distrust all objects of her previous worship, human and divine. The moment was one when the most fundamental social and religious principles were being called in question.

"Nothing in my old beliefs," she writes, "was sufficiently formulated in me, from a social point of view, to help me to struggle against this cataclysm; and in the religious and socialistic theories of the moment I did not find light enough to contend with the darkness." The poet's creed with which her mind had hitherto rested satisfied was shaken, and appeared to prove a false one. She was staggered by the infinity of evil, misery, and injustice, which dwellers in great cities are not allowed to forget, the problem of humanity, the eternal mystery of suffering and wrong predominant in a world on the

beneficence of whose Supreme Power all her faiths were founded.

Her mental revolt and suffering found vent in *Lélia*, which it was an immense relief to her to write. Characteristic as an exhibition of feeling and of mastery of language, it is not in the least typical of her fiction. Yet, but for *Lélia*, and its successor *Jacques*, it is impossible to point to a work of hers that would ever have lastingly stamped her, in the public mind, as an expounder of dangerous theories. In *Lélia*, however, which is strongly imbued with Byronic colouring, she had chosen to pose somewhat as the proud angel in rebellion; and the immediate effect of hostile criticism was to confirm her in the position taken up. Neither *Lélia* nor *Jacques* combined the elements of lasting popularity with those of instant success; but they roused a stir and a strife which created an impression of her as a writer systematically inimical to religion and marriage—an impression almost ludicrously at variance with facts, taking her fiction as a whole, but which has only recently begun to give way, in this country, to a juster estimate of its tendencies.

The morality of *Lélia*, which it is rather difficult to discuss seriously in the present day, both the personages and their environment being too preternatural for any direct application to be drawn from them, as reflecting modern society, found indiscreet champions as determined as its aggressors. Violently denounced by

M. Capo de Feuillide, of the *Europe littéraire*, it was warmly defended by M. Gustave Planche, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. The war of words grew so hot between them that a challenge and encounter were the result—surely unique in the annals of duelling. The swords of the critics fortunately proved more harmless than their words.

From the morbid depression that had tormented her mind and imagination, and has its literary memorial in *Lélia*, she was to find a timely, though but a temporary rescue, in the charm of a new acquaintance—the delighting society of a poetic mind of an order not inferior to her own.

It was in August 1833, at a dinner given by Buloz to the staff of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, that George Sand first made the personal acquaintance of Alfred de Musset, then in his twenty-third year, and already famous through his just published poem, *Rolla*, and his earlier dramas, *Andrea del Sarto* and *Les Caprices de Marianne*. He rapidly became enamoured of the author of *Lélia*, who for her part felt powerfully the attraction of his many admirable qualities, mutual enchantment leading them so far as to believe they could be the hero and heroine of a happy love tale. In a letter of September 21, addressed to her friend and correspondent, Sainte-Beuve, whom she had made the confidant of her previous depression and strange moods of gloom, she writes of herself as

lifted out of such dangers by a happiness beyond any she had imagined, restoring youth to her heart—the happiness accorded her by the poet's society and his preference for her own. De Musset, at this time, would have given the world to have been able to make her his wife.

The story of their short-lived infatuation and of the swift-following mutual disenchantment,—a story which, says Sainte-Beuve, has become part of the romance of the nineteenth century,—is perhaps of less consequence here than in the life of De Musset, in whom the over-sensitiveness of genius was not allied with the extraordinary healthy vitality which enabled George Sand to come out of the most terrible mental experiences unembittered, with the balance of her mind unshaken, and her powers unimpaired. Yet that he acquired an empire over her no other ever acquired there is much to indicate. It took her from France for a while, from her children, her friends—and the breaking of the spell set her at war, not only with him, but for a while with herself, with life, and her fellow creatures.

In the last days of 1833, she and the author of *Rolla* started on a journey to Italy, where George Sand spent six months, and where she has laid the scene of a number of her novels: the first and best part of *Consuelo, La Dernière Aldini, Leone Leoni, La Daniella,* and others. The spirit of that land she has caught and reproduced perhaps more successfully than any other of the many novelists who have chosen it for a frame—of Italy as the

artist's native country, that is—not the Italy of political history, nor of the Medici, but the Italy that is the second home of painters, poets, and musicians. Can anything be more enjoyable, and at the same time more vividly true, than George Sand's delineations of Venice; and, in the first of the *Lettres d'un Voyageur*, the pictures given of her wanderings on the shores of the Brenta, of Bassano, the Brenta valley, Oliero, Possagno, Asolo, a delicious land, till quite recently as little tourist-trodden as in 1834? What a contrast to the purely imaginary descriptions in *Lélia*, written before those beauties had appeared to her except in dreams!

From Genoa the travellers journeyed to Pisa, Florence, and thence to Venice, where first George Sand felt herself really at home in Italy. The architecture, the simplicity of Venetian life and manners, the theatres—from the opera-houses, where Pasta and Donzelli were singing, down to the national drama of Pulchinello—the pictures, the sea, the climate, combined to make of it a place of residence so perfectly to her mind, that again and again in her letters she expresses her wish that she could bring over her children and there fix her abode.

"It is the only town I can love for its own sake," she says of it. "Other cities are like prisons, which you put up with for the sake of your fellow-prisoners." This Italian journey marks a fresh stage in her artistic development, quite apart from the attendant romantic

circumstances, the alleged disastrous consequences to a child of genius less wise and fortunate than herself, which have given an otherwise disproportionate notoriety to this brief episode.

George Sand was no doubt fatally in error when she persuaded herself, and even succeeded in persuading the poet's anxious mother, that she had it in her to be his guardian angel, and reform him miraculously in a short space of time; and that because he had fallen in love with her she would know how to make him alter a way of life he had no abiding desire to abandon. Such a task demands a readiness not merely for self-sacrifice, but for self-suppression; and her individuality was far too pronounced to merge itself for long in ministering to another's. She never seems to have possessed the slightest moral ascendancy over him, beyond the power of wounding him very deeply by the change in her sentiments, however much he might feel himself to blame for it.

The history of the separation of the lovers—of De Musset's illness, jealousy, and departure from Venice alone—is a thrice-told tale. Like the subject of "The Ring and the Book," it has been set forth, by various persons, variously interested, with correspondingly various colouring. The story, as told by George Sand in her later novel, *Elle et Lui*, is substantially the same as one related by De Musset in his *Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*, published two years after these

events, and in which, if it is to be regarded as reflecting personal idiosyncrasies in the slightest degree, the poet certainly makes himself out as the most insupportable of human companions. None the less did the publication of *Elle et Lui*, a quarter of a century later, provoke a savage retort from the deceased poet's brother, in *Lui et Elle*. Finally, in *Lui*, a third novelist, Madame Colet, presented the world with a separate version of the affair from one who imagined she could have made up to the poet for what he had lost.

But it needs no deep study of human nature, or yet of these novels, to understand the impracticability of two such minds long remaining together in unity. Genius, in private life, is apt to be a torment—its foibles demanding infinite patience, forbearance, nay, affectionate blindness, in those who would minister to its happiness, and mitigate the worst results of those foibles themselves. Certainly George Sand, for a genius, was a wonderfully equable character; her "satanic" moods showed themselves chiefly in pen and ink; her nerves were very strong, the balance of her physical and mental organisation was splendidly even, as one imagines Shakespeare's to have been. But the very vigour of her character, its force of self-assertion, unfitted her to be the complement to any but a very yielding nature. The direct influence a passive, merely receptive spirit would have accepted, and gratefully, was soon felt as an intolerable burden by a mind in

many ways different from her own, but with the same imperious instinct of freedom, and as little capable of playing anvil to another mind for long. He rebelled against her ascendancy, but suffered from the spell. She was no Countess Guiccioli, content to adore and be adored, and exercise an indirect power for good on a capricious lover. Her logical mind, energetic and independent, grew impatient of the seeming inconsistencies of her gifted companion; and when at last she began to perceive in them the fatal conditions of those gifts themselves, only compassion survived in her, as she thought, and compassion was cold.

How could De Musset, with such an excellent example of prudence, regular hours, good sense, calm self-possession, and ceaseless literary industry as hers before his eyes, not be stirred up to emulate such admirable qualities? But her reason made him unreasonable; the indefatigability of her pen irritated his nerves, and made him idle out of contradiction; her homilies provoked only fresh imprudences—as though he wanted to make proof of his independence whilst secretly feeling her dominion — a phenomenon with which highly nervous people will sympathise not a little, but which was perfectly inexplicable to George Sand.

His genius was of a more delicate essence than hers; he has struck, at times, a deeper note. But his nature was frailer, his muse not so easily within call, his character as intolerant of restraint as her own, but less

self-sufficing; and the morbid taint of thought then prevalent, and which her natural optimism and better balanced faculties enabled her to throw off very shortly, had entered into him ineffaceably. Whether or not she brought a fresh blight on his mind, she certainly failed to cure it.

The spring had hardly began when De Musset was struck down by fever. George Sand, who had previously been very ill herself, nursed him through his attack with great devotion; and in six weeks' time he was restored to health, if not to happiness. Theirs was at an end, as they recognised, and agreed to part—"for a time, perhaps, or perhaps for ever," she wrote,—with their attachment broken, but not destroyed.

It was early in April that De Musset started on his homeward journey. George Sand saw him on his way as far as Vicenza, and ere returning to Venice, made a little excursion in the Alps, along the course of the Brenta. "I have walked as much as four-and-twenty miles a day," she writes to M. Boucoiran, "and found out that this sort of exercise is very good for me, both morally and physically. Tell Buloz I will write some letters for the *Revue*, upon my pedestrian tours. I came back into Venice with only seven centimes in my pocket, otherwise I should have gone as far as the Tyrol; but the want of baggage and money obliged me to return. In a few days I shall start again, and cross over the Alps by the gorges of the Piave."

And the spring's delights on the Alpine borders of Lombardy are described by her, *con amore*, in the promised letters :—

The country was not yet in its full splendour; the fields were of a faint green verging on yellow, and the leaves only coming into bud on the trees. But here and there the almonds and peaches in flower mixed their garlands of pink and white with the dark clumps of cypress. Through the midst of this far-spreading garden the Brenta flowed swiftly and silently over her sandy bed, between two large banks of pebbles, and the rocky *débris* which she tears out of the heart of the Alps, and with which she furrows the plains in her days of anger. A semi-circle of fertile hills, overspread with those long festoons of twisting vine that suspend themselves from all the trees in Venetia, made a near frame to the picture; and the snowy mountain-heights, sparkling in the first rays of sunshine, formed an immense second border, standing, as if cut out in silver, against the solid blue of the sky.

None of these excursions, however, were ever carried very far. For the next three months she remained almost entirely stationary at Venice, her head-quarters. She had taken apartments for herself in the interior of the city, in a little low-built house, along the narrow, green, and yet limpid canal, close to the Ponte dei Barcaroli. "There," she tells us, "alone all the afternoon, never going out except in the evening for a breath of air, working at night as well, to the song of the tame nightingales that people all Venetian balconies, I wrote *André, Jacques, Mattea,* and the first *Lettres d'un Voyageur.*"

None can read the latter and suppose that the suffering of the recent parting was all on one side. The poet continued to correspond with her, and the conscious-

ness of the pain she had inflicted she was clearly not sufficiently indifferent herself to support. But neither De Musset nor any other in whom, through the "prism of enthusiasm," she may have seen awhile a hero of romance, was ever a primary influence on her life. These were two. Firstly her children, who although at a distance were seldom absent from her thoughts. Of their well-being at school and at home respectively, she was careful to keep herself informed, down to the minutest particulars, by correspondents in Paris and at Nohant, whence no opposition whatever was raised by its occupier to her prolonged absence abroad. Secondly, her art-vocation. She wrote incessantly; and independently of the pecuniary obligations to do so which she put forward, it is obvious that she had become wedded to this habit of work. "The habit has become a faculty—the faculty a need. I have thus come to working for thirteen hours at a time without making myself ill; seven or eight a day on an average, be the task done better or worse," she writes to M. Chatiron, from Venice, in March. Sometimes, as with *Leone Leoni,* she would complete a novel in a week; a few weeks later it was in the *Revue des Deux Mondes.* Such haste she afterwards deprecated and, like all other workers, she aspired to a year's holiday in which to devote herself to the study of the masterpieces of modern literature; but the convenient season for such suspension of her own productive

activity never came. And whilst at Venice she found herself literally in want of money to leave it. Buloz had arranged with her that she should contribute thirty-two pages every six weeks to his periodical for a yearly stipend of £160. She had anticipated her salary for the expenses of her Italian journey, and must acquit herself of the arrears due before she could take wing.

Jacques, the longest of the novels written at Venice, afforded fresh grounds to those who taxed her works with hostility to social institutions. Without entering into the vexed question of the right of the artist in search of variety to exercise his power on any theme that may invite to its display, and of the precise bearing of ethical rules on works of imagination, it is permissible to doubt that *Jacques*, however bitter the sentiments of the author at that time regarding the marriage tie, ever seriously disturbed the felicity of any domestic household in the past or present day. It is too lengthy and too melancholy to attract modern readers, who care little to revel in the luxuries of woe, so relished by those of a former age. We cannot do better than quote the judgment pronounced by Madame Sand herself, thirty years later, on this work of pure sentimentalism—generated by an epoch thrown into commotion by the passionate views of romanticism—the epoch of René, Lara, Childe Harold, Werther, types of desperate men; life-weary, but by no means

weary of talking. "*Jacques*," she observes, "belonged to this large family of disillusioned thinkers; they had their *raison d'être*, historical and social. He comes on the scene in the novel, already worn by deceptions; he thought to revive through his love, and he does not revive. Marriage was for him only the drop of bitterness that made the cup overflow. He killed himself to bequeath to others the happiness for which he cared not, and in which he believed not."

Jacques, taken as a *plaidoyer* against domestic institutions, singularly misses its aim. As critics have remarked, some of the most eloquent pages are those that treat of married bliss. Our sympathies are entirely with the wronged husband against his silly little wife. It is a kindred work to *Lélia*, and its faults are the same; but whilst dealing ostensibly with real life and possible human beings it cannot, like *Lélia*, be placed apart, and retain interest as a literary curiosity.

André is a very different piece of work and a little masterpiece of its kind. The author, in her preface, tells us how, whilst mechanically listening to the incessant chatter of the Venetian sempstresses in the next room to her own, she was struck by the resemblance between the mode of life and thought their talk betrayed, and that of the same class of girls at La Châtre; and how in the midst of Venice, to the sound of the rippling water stirred by the gondolier's oar,

of guitar and serenade, and within sight of the marble palaces, her thoughts flew back to the dark and dirty streets, the dilapidated houses, the wretched moss-grown roofs, the shrill concerts of the cocks, cats, and children of the little French provincial town. She dreamt also of the lovely meadows, the scented hay, the little running streams, and the floral researches she had been fond of. This tenacity of her instincts was a safeguard she may have sometimes rebelled against as a chain; it was with her an essential feature, and, despite all vagaries, gave a great unity to her life.

"Venice," she writes to M. Chatiron in June, "with her marble staircases and her wonderful climate, does not make me forget anything that has been dear to me. Be sure that nothing in me dies. My life has its agitations; destiny pushes me different ways, but my heart does not repudiate the past. Old memories have a power none can ignore, and myself less than another. I love on the contrary to recall them, and we shall soon find ourselves together again in the old nest at Nohant." *André* she considered the outcome of this feeling of nostalgia. In it she has put together the vulgar elements of inferior society in a common-place country town, and produced a poem, though one of the saddest. If the florist heroine, Genevieve, is a slightly idealised figure, the story and general character-treatment are realistic to a painful degree. There is mor

power of simple pathos shown here than is common in the works of George Sand. *André* is a refreshing contrast, in its simplicity and brevity, to the inflation of *Lélia* and *Jacques*. It was an initial essay, and a model one, in a style with better claims to enduring popularity.

As the summer advanced, George Sand found herself free to depart, and started on her way back to France, famishing, as she tells us, for the sight of her children. Her grand anxiety was to reach her destination in time for the breaking-up day and distribution of prizes at the College Henri IV. "I shall be at Paris before then," she writes from Milan, to her son, "if I die on the way, and really the heat is such that one might die of it." From Milan she journeyed over the Simplon to the Rhone valley, Martigny, Chamounix, and Geneva, performing great part of the way on foot. She reached Paris in the middle of August, and a few days later started with her boy for Nohant, where Solange had spent the time during her mother's absence, and where they remained together for the holidays. Here too she was in the midst of a numerous circle of friends of both sexes, in whose staunch friendliness she found a solace of which she stood in real need.

CHAPTER V.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT.

THE period immediately following George Sand's return from Italy in August 1834, was a time of transition, both in her outer and inner life. If undistinguished by the production of any novel calculated to create a fresh sensation, it shows no abatement of literary activity. This, as we have seen, had become to her a necessity of nature. Neither vicissitudes without nor commotions within, though they might direct or stimulate, seem to have acted as a check on the flow of her pen.

During the first twelvemonth she continued to reside alternately at Nohant, whither she came with her son and daughter for their holidays—Solange being now placed in a children's school kept by some English ladies at Paris,—and her "poet's garret," as she styled her third floor *appartement* on the Quai Malplaquet.

This winter saw the ending for herself and De Musset of their hapless romance. An approach to complete

reconciliation—for the existing partial estrangement had been discovered to be more unbearable than all besides—led to stormy scenes and violent discord, and resulted before very long in mutual avoidance, which was to be final. It is said that forgiveness is the property of the injured, and it should be remembered that whenever De Musset's name is mentioned by George Sand it is with the admiring respect of one to whom his genius made that name sacred, and who refused to the end of his life to use the easy weapon offered her by his notorious frailties for vindicating herself at his expense. And, however pernicious the much-talked of effect on De Musset's mind, it is but fair to the poet to recollect that it is no less true of him than of George Sand that his best work, that with which his fame has come chiefly to associate itself, was accomplished after this painful experience.

Into her own mental state—possibly at this time the least enviable of the two—we get some glimpses in the *Lettres d'un Voyageur* of the autumn 1834, and winter 1834–35. Here, again, we should be content with gathering a general impression, and not ingenuously read literal facts in all the self-accusations and recorded experiences of the "*voyageur*"—a semi-fictitious personage whose improvisations were, after all, only a fresh exercise which George Sand had invented for her imagination—taking herself and reality for a starting-point merely, a suggestive theme.

But the despair and disgust of life, to which both these and her private letters give such uncompromising and eloquent expression, indubitably reflect her feelings at this moral crisis—the feelings of one who having openly braved the laws of society, to become henceforward a law unto herself, recognises that she has only found her way to fresh sources of misery. Never yet had she had such grave and deep causes of individual mental torment to blacken her views of existence, and incline her to abhor it as a curse. "Your instinct will save you, bring you back to your children," wrote a friend who knew her well. But her maternal love and solicitude themselves were becoming a source of added distress and apprehension.

The extraordinary arrangement she and M. Dudevant had entered into four years before with regard to each other, was clearly one impossible to last. It will be recollected that she at that time had relinquished her patrimony to those who had thought it no dishonour to continue to enjoy it; and the terms of that agreement had since been nominally undisturbed. But besides that the control of the children remained a constant subject of dissension, M. Dudevant was beginning to get into pecuniary difficulties in the management of his wife's estate. Sometimes he contemplated resigning it to her, and retiring to Gascony to live with his widowed stepmother on the property which at her death would revert to him. But unfortunately he

could not make up his mind to this course. No sooner had he drawn up an agreement consenting to a division of property, than he seemed to regret the sacrifice; upon which she ceased to press it.

Meantime Madame Dudevant, whose position at Nohant was that of a visitor merely, and becoming untenable, felt her hold on her cherished home and her children becoming more precarious day by day.

Some of her friends had strongly advised her to travel for a length of time, both as offering a moral remedy, and as a temporary escape from the practical perplexities of the moment. Her rescue, however, was to be otherwise effected, and a number of new intellectual interests that sprang up for her at this time all tended to retain her in her own country.

It was in the course of this spring that she made the acquaintance of M. de Lamennais, introduced to her by their common friend, the composer Franz Liszt. The famous author of the *Paroles d'un Croyant* had virtually severed himself from the Church of Rome by his recent publication of this little volume, pronounced by the Pope, "small in size, immense in perversity!" The eloquence of the poet-priest, and the doctrines of the anti-Catholic and humanitarian Christianity of which he came forward as the expounder, could not fail powerfully to impress her intelligence. Here seemed the harbour of refuge her half-wrecked faiths were seeking, and what the abbé's antagonists denounced as the

"diabolical gospel of social science," came to her as the teachings of an angel of light. Christianity as preached by him was a sort of realisation of the ideal religion of Aurore Dupin—faith divorced from superstition and the doctrine of Romish infallibility. Complete identity of sentiments between herself and the abbé was out of the question. But his was the right mind coming to her mind at the right moment, and exercised a healing influence over her troubled spirits. For *Le Monde,* a journal founded by him shortly after this time, she wrote the *Lettres à Marcie,* an unfinished series, treating of moral and spiritual problems and trials. Finally the position M. de Lamennais had taken up as the apostle of the people further enlisted her sympathies in his cause, which made religious one with social reform, and amalgamated the protest against moral enslavement with the liberation-schemes then fermenting in young and generous minds all over Europe.

The belief in the possibility of their speedy realisation was then wide-spread—a conviction that, as Heine puts it, some grand recipe for freedom and equality, invented, well drawn up, and inserted in the *Moniteur,* was all that was needed to secure those benefits for the world at large. If George Sand, led afterwards into searching for this empirical remedy for the wrongs and sufferings of the masses, believed the elixir to have been found in the establishment of popular sovereignty by universal suffrage, it was through the persuasive arguments of the

leaders of the movement, with whom at this period she was first brought into personal relations. Her own unbiassed judgment, to which she reverted long years after, when she had seen these illusions perish sadly, was less sanguine in its prognostications for the immediate future, as appears in her own reflections in a letter of this time:—

What I see in the midst of the divergencies of all these reforming sects is a waste of generous sentiments and of noble thoughts, a tendency towards social amelioration, but an impossibility for the time to bring forth through the want of a head to that great body with a hundred hands, that tears itself to pieces, for not knowing what to attack. So far the struggles make only dust and noise. We have not yet come to the era that will construct new societies, and people them with perfected men.

She had recently been introduced to a political and legal celebrity of his day, the famous advocate Michel, of Bourges. He was then at the height of his reputation, which, won by his eloquent and successful defence of political prisoners on various occasions, was considerable. Madame Sand had been advised to consult him professionally about her business affairs, and for this purpose went over one day with some of her Berrichon friends to see him at Bourges. But the man of law had, it appears, been reading *Lélia*, and instead of talking of business with his distinguished client, dashed at once into politics, philosophy, and social science, overpowering his listeners with the strength of his oratory. His sentiments were those of extreme radicalism, and he carried on a little private

propaganda in the country around. The force of his character seems to have spent itself in oratorical effort. He could preach revolution but not suggest reform, denounce existing abuses, but do nothing towards the remodelling of social institutions, and in after years he failed, as so many leading men in his profession have failed, to make any impression as a speaker in Parliament. The author of *Lélia* was overwhelmed, if not all at once converted, by the tremendous rhetorical power of this singular man. She was a proselyte worth the trouble of making, and Michel was bent on drawing her more closely into active politics, with which hitherto she had occupied herself very little. He began a correspondence, writing her long epistles, the sum of which, she says, may thus be resumed :—"Your scepticism springs from personal unhappiness. Love is selfish. Extend this solicitude for a single individual to the whole human race." He certainly succeeded in inspiring her with a strong desire to share his passion for politics, his faith, his revivifying hopes of a speedy social renovation, his ambition to be one of its apostles. To Michel, under the sobriquet of "Everard," are addressed several of the *Lettres d'un Voyageur* of the spring and summer of 1835, letters which she defines as "a rapid analysis of a rapid conversion."

But Michel's work was a work of demolition only; and when his earnest disciple wanted new theories in

place of the old forms so ruthlessly destroyed, he had none to offer. There were others, however, who could. She was soon to be put into communication with a number of the active workers for the republican cause throughout the country. They counted many of the best hearts and not the worst heads in France, and were naturally eager to enlist her energies on their side.

Foremost, by right of the influence exercised over her awhile by his writings, was the philosopher Pierre Leroux, with whom her acquaintance dates from this same year. In spite of the wide divergence between her pre-eminently artistic spirit and a mind of the rougher stamp of this born iconoclast, he was to indoctrinate her with many new opinions. His disinterested character won her admiration; he was a practical philanthropist as well as a critical thinker, one whose life and fighting power were devoted to promoting the good of the working classes to whom he belonged, having been brought up as a printer. He was regarded as the apostle of communism, as then understood, or rather not understood—for the form under which it suggested itself to the social reformers of the period in question was entirely indefinite.

Meantime the novelist's pen was far from idle. One or two pleasant glimpses she has given us into her manner of working belong to this year. In the summer, the

heat in her "poet's garret" becoming intolerable, she took refuge in a congenial solitude offered by the ground-floor apartments of the house, then in course of reconstruction, dismantled and untenanted. The works had been temporarily suspended, and Madame Sand took possession of the field abandoned by the builders and carpenters. The windows and doors opening into the garden had been taken away, and the place thus turned into an airy, cool retreat. Out of the apparatus of the workmen, left behind, she constructed her writing-establishment, and here, secure from interruption, denying herself to all visitors, never going out except to visit her children at their respective schools, she completed her novel, with no companions but the spiders crawling over the planks, the mice running in and out of the corners, and the blackbirds hopping in from the garden; the deep sense of solitude enhanced by the roar of the city in the very heart of which she had thus voluntarily isolated herself.

As an artistic experience she found it refreshing, and repeated it more than once. Soon after, a friend offered her the loan of an empty house at Bourges, a town that had been suggested to her as a desirable place of residence, should the circumstances at Nohant ever force her to abandon it entirely. As a home she saw and disapproved of Bourges, but she thoroughly enjoyed a brief retreat spent there in an absolutely

deserted, vine-covered dwelling, standing in a garden enclosed by stone walls. Her meals were handed in through a wicket. A few friends came to see her in the evenings. The days, and often the nights, she passed in study and meditation, shut up in the library reading Lavater, expatiating on her impressions of his theories in a letter addressed to Franz Liszt (inserted among the *Lettres d'un Voyageur*), or strolling in the flower garden—"forgotten," she tells us, "by the whole world, and plunged into oblivion of the actualities of my own existence."

Of her numerous letters of advice to her boy at school, we quote one written during this summer of 1835, when their future relations to each other were in painful uncertainty:—

Work, be strong and proud; despise the little troubles supposed to belong to your age. Reserve your strength of resistance for deeds and facts that are worth the effort. If I am here no longer, think of me who worked and suffered cheerfully. We are like each other in mind and in countenance. I know already from this day what your intellectual life will be. I fear for you many and deep sorrows. I hope for you the purest of joys. Guard within yourself that treasure, kindness. Know how to give without hesitation, how to lose without regret, how to acquire without meanness. Know how to replace in your heart, by the happiness of those you love, the happiness that may be wanting to yourself. Keep the hope of another life. It is there that mothers meet their sons again. Love all God's creatures. Forgive those who are ill-conditioned, resist those who are unjust, and devote yourself to those who are great through their virtue. Love me. I will teach you many, many things if we live together. If that blessing (the greatest that can befall me, the only one that makes me wish for a long life) is not to be, you must pray for me, and from the grave itself, if anything remains of me in the universe, the spirit of your mother will watch over you.'

In the autumn, 1835, Madame Dudevant, under legal advice, and supported by the approval of friends of both parties, determined to apply to the courts for a judicial separation from her husband, on the plea of ill-treatment. She had sufficient grounds to allege for her claim, and had then every reason to hope that her demand would not even be contested by M. Dudevant, who, on former occasions, had voluntarily signed but afterwards revoked the agreement she hereby only desired to make valid and permanent, and which, ensuring to him a certain proportion of her income, gave her Nohant for a place of habitation, and established the children under her care.

Pending the issue of this suit, which, unexpectedly protracted, dragged on till the summer of the next year, she availed herself of the hospitality of a family at La Châtre, friends of old standing, and from under whose roof she awaited, as from a neutral ground, the decision of her judges. During this year she saw little of Paris, and less of Nohant, except for a brief visit which, profiting by a moment when its walls were absolutely deserted by every other human being, she paid to her house—not knowing then whether she would ever, so to speak, inhabit it again in her own right.

On the result of the legal proceedings depended her future home and the best part of her happiness. Sooner than be parted from her children she contem-

plated the idea, in case of the decision going against her, of escaping with them to America! Yet in the midst of all this suspense, we find her industrious as ever, joining in the day-time in the family life of the household with which she was domesticated, helping to amuse the children among them, retiring to her room at ten at night, to work on at her desk till seven in the morning according to her wont. A more cheerful tone begins to pervade her effusions. The clouds were slowly breaking on all sides at once, and a variety of circumstances combining to restore to her mind its natural tone—faith, hope, and charity to her heart, and harmony to her existence. She began to perceive what she was enabled afterwards more fully to acknowledge as follows :—

As to my religion, the ground of it has never varied. The forms of the past have vanished, for me as for my century, before the light of study and reflection. But the eternal doctrine of believers, of God and His goodness, the immortal soul and the hopes of another life, this is what, in myself, has been proof against all examination, all discussion, and even intervals of despairing doubt."

It is significant that during these months, spent for the most part at La Châtre, we find her rewriting *Lélia*, trying, as she expressed her intention, "to transform this work of anger into a work of gentleness." *Engelwald*, a novel of some length on which she was engaged, was destined never to see the light.

To the Comtesse d'Agoult, better known by her *nom*

de plume of Daniel Stern, whose acquaintance she had recently made in Paris, she writes in May 1836 :—

I am still at La Châtre, staying with my friends, who spoil me like a child of five years old. I inhabit a suburb, built in terraces against the rock—at my feet lies a wonderfully pretty valley. A garden thirty feet square and full of roses, and a terrace extensive enough for you to walk along it in ten steps, are my drawing-room, my study, and gallery. My bed-room is rather large—it is decorated with a red cotton curtained bed—a real peasant's bed, hard and flat, two straw chairs, and a white wooden table. My window is situated six feet above the terrace. By the trellised trees on the wall I can get out and in, and stroll at night among my thirty feet of flowers without having to open a door or awake anyone.

Sometimes I go out riding alone, at dusk. I come in towards midnight. My cloak, my rough hat, and the melancholy trot of my nag, make me pass in the darkness for a commercial traveller, or a farm-boy.

One of my grand amusements is to watch the transition from night to day; it effects itself in a thousand different manners. This revolution, apparently so uniform, has every day a character of its own.

The summer that had set in was unusually hot and sultry. Writing to Madame d'Agoult, July 10, 1836, she thus describes her enjoyment of a season that allowed of some of the pleasures of primitive existence :—

I start on foot at three in the morning, fully intending to be back by eight o'clock; but I lose myself in the lanes; I forget myself on the banks of the river; I run after butterflies; and I get home at midday in a state of torrefaction impossible to describe.

Another time the sight of the cooling stream is more than she can resist, and she walks into the Indre fully dressed; but a few minutes more and the sun has dried her garments, and she proceeds on her walk of

The affair thus concluded, Madame Sand entered formally into possession of Nohant; and early in September she started with her two children for Switzerland, where they spent the autumn holidays in a long-contemplated visit to her friend the Comtesse d'Agoult, then at Geneva. This tour is fancifully sketched in a closing number of the *Lettres d'un Voyageur*, a volume which stands as a sort of literary memorial of two years of unsettled, precarious existence, material and spiritual—a time of trial now happily at an end.

Simon, a tale dedicated to Madame d'Agoult, and published in the *Revue des Deùx Mondes*, 1836—a graceful story, of no high pretensions—is noticeable as marking the commencement of a decided and agreeable change in the tone of George Sand's fiction. Hitherto the predominant note struck had been most often one of melancholy, if not despair—the more hopelessly painful the subject, the more fervent, apparently, the inspiration to the writer. In *Indiana* she had portrayed the double victim of tyranny and treachery; in *Valentine*, a helpless girl sacrificed to family ambition and social prejudice; in *Lélia* and *Jacques*, the incurable *Weltschmerz*, heroism unvalued and wasted; in *Leone Leoni*, the infatuation of a weak-minded woman for a phenomenal scoundrel; in *André*, the wretchedness which a timid selfish character, however amiable, may bring down on itself and on all connected

with it. Henceforward she prefers themes of a pleasanter nature. In *Simon* she paints the triumph of true and patient love over social prejudice and strong opposition. In *Mauprat,* written in 1837, at Nohant, she exerts all the force of her imagination and language to bring before us vividly the gradual redemption of a noble but degraded nature, through the influence of an exclusive, passionate and indestructible affection. The natural optimism of her temperament, not her incidental misfortunes, began and continued to colour her compositions.

From Switzerland she returned for part of the winter to Paris. She had given up her "poet's garret," and occupied for a while a suite of rooms in the Hôtel de France, where resided also Madame d'Agoult. The *salon* of the latter was a favourite *rendez-vous* of cosmopolitan artistic celebrities, whose general *rendez-vous* just then was Paris. A very Pantheon must have been an intimate circle that included, among others, George Sand, Daniel Stern, Heine, the Polish poet Mickiewicz, Eugène Delacroix, Meyerbeer, Liszt, Hiller, and Frédéric Chopin.

The delicate health of her son forced Madame Sand to leave with him shortly for Berry, where he soon became convalescent. Later in the season, some of the same party of friends that had met in Paris met again at Nohant. It was during this summer that George Sand wrote for her child the well-known

little tale, *Les Maîtres Mosaïstes*, in which the adventures of the Venetian mosaic-workers are woven into so charming a picture. "I do not know why, but it is seldom that I have written anything with so much pleasure," she tells us. "It was in the country, in summer weather, as hot as the Italian climate I had lately left. I have never seen so many birds and flowers in my garden. Liszt was playing the piano on the ground floor, and the nightingales, intoxicated with music and sunshine, were singing madly in the lilac-trees around."

The party was abruptly dispersed upon the intelligence that reached Madame Sand of her mother's sudden, and, as it proved, fatal illness. She hurried to Paris, and remained with Madame Maurice Dupin during her last days. The old fond affection between them, though fitful in its manifestations on the part of the mother, had never been impaired, and the breaking of this old link with the past was very deeply felt by Madame Sand.

Before returning to Nohant, she spent a few weeks at Fontainebleau with her son, from whom she never liked to separate. They passed their days in exploring the forest, then larger and wilder than now, botanising and butterfly-hunting. At night she sat up writing, when all was quiet in the inn. Just as, whilst at Venice, her fancy flew back to the scenes and characters of French provincial life, and *André* was the

result, so here, amid the forest landscapes of her own land, her imagination rushed off to Venice and the shores of the Brenta, and produced *La Dernière Aldini*.

This constant industry, which had now become her habit of life, was more of a practical necessity than ever. Nohant, as already mentioned, barely repaid the owner the expenses of keeping it up. Madame Sand, who desired to be liberal besides, to travel occasionally, to gratify little artistic fancies as they arose, must look to her literary work to furnish the means.

"Sometimes," she writes from Nohant, in October 1837, to Madame d'Agoult, then in Italy, "I am tempted to realise my capital, and come and join you; but out there I should do no work, and the galley-slave is chained up. If Buloz lets him go for a walk it is on *parole*, and *parole* is the cannon-ball the convict drags on his foot."

Nor was it for herself only that she worked in future, but for her children, the whole responsibility of providing for both of whose education she was now about definitely to take on her own shoulders. The power of interference left to M. Dudevant by the recent legal decision had been exercised in a manner leading to fresh vexatious contention, and continual alarm on Madame Sand's part lest the boy should be taken by force from her side. These skirmishes included the actual abduction of Solange from Nohant by M. Dudevant during her mother's absence at Fon-

tainebleau; a foolish and purposeless trick, by which nothing was to be gained, except annoyance and trouble to Madame Sand, whose right to the control of her daughter had never been contested. A final settlement entered into between the parties, in 1838, placed these matters henceforward on a footing of peace, fortunately permanent. By this agreement Madame Sand received back from M. Dudevant—who had lately succeeded to his father's estate—some house property that formed part of her patrimony, and paid down to him the sum of £2,000; he ceding to her the remnant of his paternal rights; she freeing him from all charges for Maurice's education, her authority over which, in future, was recognised as complete.

CHAPTER VI.

SOLITUDE, SOCIETY, AND SOCIALISM.

The charge of both children now resting entirely in her hands, Madame Sand was enabled to fulfil her desire of permanently removing her boy, now fourteen years of age, from the College Henri IV. Not only was she opposed to the general *régime* and educational system pursued in French public schools of this type, she felt persuaded of its special unsuitability to her son, whose tastes and temperament were artistic, like her own, and whose classical studies had been repeatedly interrupted by illness. His delicate health determined her to spend the winter of 1838–9 abroad, with her family. Having heard the climate and scenery of Majorca highly praised, she selected the island for their resort; tempted herself by the prospect of a few months absolute quiet, where, with neither letters to answer nor newspapers to read, she would enjoy some rare leisure, which she proposed to

spend in studying history and teaching French to her children.

Just at this time her friend and ardent admirer, Frédéric Chopin, was recovering from a chest attack, the first presage of the illness that caused his early death. The eminent pianist and composer had also been recommended to winter in the South, and greatly needed repose and change of air to recruit him from the fatigues of the Parisian season. It was arranged that the convalescent should make one of the expedition to Majorca. He joined Madame Sand and her children at Perpignan, and they embarked for Barcelona, whence the sea-voyage to the island was safely accomplished, the party reaching Palma, the capital, in magnificent November weather, and never suspecting how soon they would have cause to repent their choice of a retreat.

But their practical information about the island proved lamentably insufficient. With the scenery, indeed, they were enraptured. "We found," says Madame Sand in her little volume, *Un Hiver à Majorque,* published the following year, "a green Switzerland, under a Calabrian sky, with all the solemnity and stillness of the East." But though a painter's Elysium, Majorca was wanting in the commonest comforts of civilised life. Inns were non-existent, foreigners viewed and treated with suspicion. The party thought themselves fortunate in securing a

villa some miles from Palma, furnished, though scantily. "The country, nature, trees, sky, sea, and mountains surpass all my dreams," she writes in the first days, "it is the promised land; and as we have succeeded in housing ourselves pretty well, we are delighted."

The delight was of brief duration. That Madame Sand's manuscripts took a month to reach the editor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*; that the piano ordered from Paris for Chopin took two months to get to Majorca, were the least among their troubles. A rainy season of exceptional severity set in, and the villa quickly became uninhabitable. It was not weather-proof. Chopin fell alarmingly ill. Good food and medical attendance were hardly to be procured for him; and finally the villa proprietor, having heard that his tenant was suffering from consumption—an illness believed to be infectious by the Majorcans—gave the whole party notice to quit. The invalid improving somewhat, though still too weak to attempt the return journey to France, Madame Sand transported her ambulance, as she styled it, to some more tolerable quarters she had already discovered in the deserted Carthusian monastery of Valdemosa—"a poetical name and a poetical abode," she writes; "an admirable landscape, grand and wild, with the sea at both ends of the horizon, formidable peaks around us, eagles pursuing their prey even down to the orange-trees in our garden, a cypress walk winding from the

top of our mountain to the bottom of the gorge, torrents overgrown with myrtles, palm-trees below our feet, nothing could be more magnificent than this spot."

Parts of the old monastic buildings were dilapidated; the rest were in good order, being frequented as a summer retreat by the inhabitants of Palma. Now, in December, the Chartreuse was entirely abandoned, except by a housekeeper, a sacristan and a lone monk, the last offshoot of the community—a kind of apothecary, whose stock-in-trade was limited to guimauve and dog-grass.

The rooms into which the travellers moved had just been vacated by a Spanish family of political refugees, departing for France. These lodgings were at least provided with doors, window-panes, and decent furniture; but the luxury of chimneys was unknown, and a stove, which had to be manufactured at an enormous price on purpose for the party, is described as "a sort of iron cauldron, that made our heads ache and dried up our throats." Continuous stormy weather having suspended steam traffic with the mainland, the visitors had no choice but to remain prisoners some two months more, during which the deluge went on with little intermission.

Still, to young and romantic imaginations the island and life in the ex-monastery offered considerable charm. Madame Sand and her children were delighted with the unfamiliar vegetation, the palms, aloes,

olives, almond and orange trees, the Arab architecture, and picturesque costumes. Valdemosa itself was splendidly situated among the mountains, in a stone-walled garden surrounded with cypress trees and planted with palms and olives. In the morning Madame Sand gave lessons to the children; in the afternoon they ran wild out of doors whilst she wrote—when the invalid musician was well enough to be left. In the evenings she and the young people went wandering by moonlight through the cloisters, exploring the monkish cells and chapels. Maurice had fortunately recovered his health completely, but poor Chopin's state, aggravated by the damp weather and privations—for the difficulties in obtaining a regular supply of provisions were immense—remained throughout their stay a constant and terrible cause of anxiety and responsibility to Madame Sand. From the islanders no sort of help or even sympathy was forthcoming, and thievish servants and extortionate traders were not the least of the annoyances with which the strangers had to contend. In a letter to François Rollinat she gives a graphic account of their misfortunes :—

It has rightly been laid down as a principle that where nature is beautiful and generous, men are bad and avaricious. We had all the trouble in the world to procure the commonest articles of food, such as the island produces in abundance; thanks to the signal dishonesty, the plundering spirit of the peasants, who made us pay for everything three times what it was worth, so that we were at their mercy under the penalty of dying of hunger. We could get no one to serve us, because we were

not *Christians* [the travellers passed for being "sold to the Devil" because they did not go to Mass], and, besides, nobody would attend on a consumptive invalid. However, for better for worse, we were established. . . . The place was incomparably poetical; we did not see a living soul, nothing disturbed our work; after waiting two months, and paying three hundred francs extra, Chopin had at last received his piano, and delighted the vaults of his cell with his melodies. Health and strength were visibly returning to Maurice; as for me, I worked as tutor seven hours a day; I sat up working on my own account half the night; Chopin composed masterpieces, and we hoped to put up with the remainder of our discomforts by the aid of these compensations.

It was in the cells of Valdemosa that Madame Sand completed her novel of monastic life, *Spiridion*, then publishing in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. "For heaven's sake not so much mysticism!" prayed the editor of her now and then, and assuredly those readers for whom George Sand was simply a purveyor of passionate romances, those critics who set her down in their minds as exclusively a glorifier of mutinous emotion and the apologist of lawless love, must have been taken aback by these pages, in which she had devoted her most fervent energies to tracing the spiritual history, *peu récréatif*, as she dryly observes, of a monk who, in the days of the decadence of the monastic orders, retained earnestness and sincerity; whose mind, revolted by the hypocrisy and worldliness around him, passes through the successive stages of heresy and philosophic doubt, and to whom is finally revealed an eternal gospel, which lies at the core of his old religion, but which later growths have stifled, and which outlasts all

shocks and changes, and is to generate the religion of the future.

The compositions of Chopin above alluded to include the finest of his well-known Preludes, which may easily be conceived of as suggested by the strange mingling of contrasting impressions in the Chartreuse. "Several of these Preludes," writes Madame Sand, "represent the visions that haunted him of deceased monks, the sounds of funeral chaunts; others are soft and melancholy; these came to him in his hours of sunshine and health, at the sound of the children's laughter beneath the window, the distant thrum of guitars and the song of the birds under the damp foliage; at the sight of the pale little roses in bloom among the snow."

The loneliness and melancholy beauty of the spot, however congenial to the romance writer or inspiring to the composer, were not the right tonics for the nerves of the over-sensitive, imaginative invalid. The care and nursing of Madame Sand made amends for much, and by her good sense she saved him from being doctored to death by local practitioners. But his fortitude, which bore up heroically against his personal danger, was not proof against the dreary influences of Valdemosa in bad weather, the fogs, the sound of the hurricane sweeping through the valley, and bringing down portions of the dilapidated building, the noise of the torrents, the cries of the scared sea-birds and the roar of the sea.

The elevation of the Chartreuse made the climate peculiarly disagreeable at this season. She writes on:—

We lived in the midst of clouds, and for fifty days were unable to get down into the plains; the roads were changed to torrents, and we saw nothing more of the sun.

I should have thought it all beautiful if poor Chopin could only have got on. Maurice was none the worse. The wind and the sea sung sublimely as they beat against the rocks. The vast and empty cloisters cracked over our heads. If I had been there when I wrote the portion of *Lélia* that takes place in the convent, I should have made it finer and truer. But my poor friend's chest got worse and worse. The fine weather did not return . . . A maid I had brought over from France, and who so far had resigned herself, on condition of enormous wages, to cook and do the housework, began to refuse attendance as too hard. The moment was coming when after having wielded the broom and managed the *pot au feu*, I was ready to drop with fatigue—for besides my work as tutor, besides my literary labour, besides the continual attention necessitated by the condition of my invalid, I had rheumatism in every limb.

The return of spring was hailed as offering a tardy release from their island. The steamers were running again, and the party determined to leave at all risks; for though Chopin's state was more precarious than ever, nothing could be worse for him than to remain. They departed feeling, she admits, as though they were escaping from the tender mercies of Polynesian savages, and once safely on board a French vessel at Barcelona, they thankfully welcomed the day that restored them to comfort and civilisation, and saw the end of an expedition that had turned out in most respects so disastrous a *fiasco*.

They remained throughout April at Marseilles, where Chopin in the hands of a good doctor became con-

valescent. From Marseilles they made a short tour in Italy, visiting Genoa and the neighbourhood, and returning to France in May, Chopin apparently on the high road to complete recovery. It was in the following year that his illness returned in a graver form, and unmistakable symptoms of consumption showed themselves. The life of a fashionable pianist in Paris, the constant excitement, late hours, and heavy strain of nervous exertion, were fatal to his future chances of preserving his health; but it was a life to which he had now become wedded, and which he never willingly left, except for his long annual visits to Nohant.

Madame Sand repeatedly contemplated settling herself entirely in the country. She had no love for Paris. "Parisian life strains our nerves and kills us in the long run," she writes from Nohant to one of her correspondents; "Ah, how I hate it, that centre of light! I would never set foot in it again, if the people I like would make the same resolution." And again speaking of her "Black Valley, so good and so stupid," she adds, "Here I am always more myself than at Paris, where I am always ill, in body and in spirit."

Paris, however, afforded greater facilities for her children's education. She had a strong desire to see her son an artist, and he was already studying painting in Delacroix's studio. Also her income at this moment did not suffice to enable her to live continuously at

Nohant where, she frankly confessed, she had not yet found out how to live economically, expected as she was to keep open house, regarded as grudging and unneighbourly if she did not maintain her establishment on a scale to which her resources as yet were unequal. Her expenses in the country she calculated as double those in Paris where, as she writes to M. Chatiron,—

Everyone's independence is admirable. You invite whom you like, and when you don't wish to receive anyone you let the porter know you are not at home. Yet I hate Paris in all other respects. There I grow stout, and my mind grows thin. You know how quiet and retired my life there is, and I do not understand why you tell me, as they say in the provinces, that *glory* keeps me there. I have no glory, I have never sought for it, and I don't care a cigarette for it. I want to breathe fresh air and live in peace. I am succeeding, but you see and you know on what conditions.

Her Paris residence, a few seasons later, she fixed in the Cour d'Orléans Rue St. Lazare, in a block of buildings one-third of which was occupied by herself and her family; another belonged to her friend, Madame Marliani, wife of the Spanish Consul, the third to Frédéric Chopin.

With respect to Chopin's long and deep attachment to Madame Sand, and its requital, concerning which so much has been written, there can surely be no greater misstatement than to speak of her as having blighted his life. This last part of his life was indeed blighted, but by ill-health and consequent nervous irritability and suffering; but such mitigation as was possible he found for eight years in the womanly devotion and

genial society of Madame Sand—real benefits to one whose strange and delicate individuality it was not easy to befriend—and which the breach that took place between them shortly before his death should not allow us to forget.

"Chopin," observes Eugène Delacroix, "belongs to the small number of those whom one can both esteem and love." Madame Sand joined a sympathetic appreciation of the refinement of his nature, and an enthusiastic admiration of his genius—feelings she shared with his numberless female worshippers—to a strength of character that lent the support no other could perhaps so fully have given, or that he would accept from no other, to the fragile, nervous, suffering tone-poet. Her sentiments towards him seem to resolve themselves into a great tenderness rather than a passionate fervour—a placid affection for himself, and an adoration for his music.

All the time their existences, so far from having been united, flowed in different, nay divergent channels. Chopin, the idol of Paris society, moved constantly in the aristocratic and fashionable world, from which Madame Sand lived aloof. She for her part had heavy domestic cares and anxieties that did not touch him, and with the political party which was absorbing more and more of her energies he had no sympathy whatever. Whether the cause were the false start she had made at the outset by her marriage, forbidding her the realization

of a woman's ideal, the non-separation of the gift of her heart from that of her whole life, or whether that her masculine strength of intellect created for her serious public interests and occupations, beside which personal pleasures and pains are apt to become of secondary moment, certain it appears that with George Sand, as with many an eminent artist of the opposite sex, such *affaires de cœur* were but ripples on the sea of a large and active existence.

The year after her return from Majorca was marked by her first appearance before the public as a dramatic author. Although it was a line in which she afterwards obtained successes, as will be seen in a future chapter, the result of this initial effort, *Cosima,* a five-act drama, was not encouraging. It was acted at the Théâtre Français in the spring of 1840, and proved a failure. It betrays no insufficient sense of dramatic effect, nor lack of the means for producing it, but decided clumsiness in the adaptation of these means to that end. The plot and personages recall those of *Indiana,* with the important differences that the *beau rôle* of the piece falls to the husband, and that the scene is transported back to Florence in the Middle Ages—an undoubted error, as giving to a play essentially modern and French in its complexities of sentiment and motive a strong local colouring of a past time and another people, making the whole seem unreal. It has a psychological subject which

Emile Augier or Dumas *fils* would know how to handle dramatically; but as treated by George Sand, we are perpetually being led to anticipate too much in the way of action, to have our expectations dissipated the next moment. A wet blanket of disappointment on this head damps any other satisfaction that the merits of the play might otherwise afford.

Hitherto she had continued to write regularly for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. As her revolutionary opinions became more pronounced they began to find utterance in her romances. Her conversion by Michel had not only been complete, but the disciple had outstripped the master. The study of the communistic theories of Pierre Leroux had familiarized her with the speculations in social science of those who at this time were devoting their attention to criticising the existing social organization and seeking, and sometimes imagining they had found, the secret of creating a better. George Sand's strong admiration for the writings of Leroux, always praised by her in the highest terms, strikes us now as extravagant, but was shared to some extent by not a few leading men of the time, such as Sainte-Beuve and Lamartine. Her intellect had eagerly followed this bold and earnest pioneer in new discovered worlds of thought; "I do not say it is the last word of humanity, but, so far, it is its most advanced expression," she states of his philosophy. The study of it had brought a clearness into her

own views, due, probably, much more to the action of her own mind upon the novel ideas suggested than to the lucidity of a system of social science as yet undetermined in some of its main points.

She writes, when looking back on this period from a long distance of time,—

After the despairs of my youth, I was governed by too many illusions. Morbid scepticism was succeeded in me by too much kindliness and ingenuousness. A thousand times over I was duped by dreams of an archangelic fusion of the opposing forces in the great strife of ideas.

Her novel *Horace,* written for the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* was rejected—as subversive of law and order—by the editor, except on condition of alterations which she declined to make.

After this temporary rupture with Buloz, Madame Sand's services were largely appropriated by the *Revue Indépendante,* a new journal, founded in 1840 by her friends Pierre Leroux and Louis Viardot, in conjunction with whose names hers appears on the title page as leading contributor. For this periodical no theories could be too advanced, no fictitious illustrations too audacious, and to its pages accordingly was *Horace* transferred. Among the secondary characters in this novel figure a young couple, immaculate otherwise in principle and in conduct, but who as converts to St. Simonism have dispensed with the ordinary legal sanction to their union. Perhaps a more solid objection to its insertion in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* was the picture introduced of the *émeute* of June 1832, painted in heroic

colours. Both these features, however, are purely incidental. The main interest and the real strength of the book lie in a remarkable study of character-development—that of the chief personage, Horace. It is a cleverly painted portrait of a type that reappears, with slight modifications, in all ages; a moral charlatan, who half imposes on himself and entirely for a while on other people. A would-be hero, genius, and chivalrous lover, he has none of the genuine qualities needed for sustaining the parts. Nonchalant and inert of temperament, he is capable of nothing beyond a short course of successful affectation. The imposition breaking down at last, he sinks helplessly into the unheroic mediocrity of position and pretension for which alone he is fit.

A veritable attempt at a Socialist novel is the *Compagnon du Tour de France*, written in the course of 1840, which must surely be ranked as one of the weakest of George Sand's productions. Exactly the converse of *Horace* may be said of this book. In the former, those most repelled by the revolutionary doctrines flashing out here and there, will yet be struck and interested by the masterly piece of character-painting that makes of the novel a success. The utmost fanaticism for the ideas ventilated in the *Compagnon du Tour de France* can reconcile no reader to the dulness and unreality of the story which make of it a failure. For her socialism itself, as set forth in her

writings, dispassionate examination of what she actually inculcated leaves but little warrant, in the state of progress now reached, for echoing the mighty outcry raised against it at the time. No doubt she thought that a complete reorganization of society on a new basis was eminently to be desired. But what she definitely advocated was, first, free education for the poor, and secondly, some fairer adjustment of the relations to each other of capital and labour. As to the first, authority has already sanctioned her opinion; the second question, if unsettled, has become a first preoccupation with statesmen and philosophers of all denominations in the present day.

With regard to the complete solution of the problem she leaves her socialist heroes, as she herself felt, in doubt and perplexity. There was something in the schemes and doctrines she conscientiously approved irreconcilable with her artist-nature—a materialistic tendency which clashed with her poetical instincts. When the stern demagogue Michel denounced the whole tribe of artists as a corrupting influence, enervating to the courage and will of a nation, she rose up energetically in defence of the confraternity to which she was born:—

Will you tell me, pray, what you mean, with your declamations against artists. Cry out against them as much as you please, but respect art. Oh you Vandal! I like that stern sectarian who wants to dress Taglioni in a stuff gown and *sabots*, and set Liszt's hands to turn the machinery of a wine-press, and who yet, as he lies on the

grass, finds the tears come into his eyes at the least linnet's song, and who makes a disturbance in the theatre to stop Othello from murdering Malibran! The austere citizen would suppress artists as social excrescences that absorb too much of the sap; but this gentleman is fond of vocal music, and so will spare the singers. Let us hope that painters will find one among your strong heads who appreciates painting, and won't wall up all studio windows. And as for the poets, they are your cousins; and you don't despise their forms of language and their rhythmical mechanism when you want to make an impression on the idle crowd. You will go to them to take lessons in metaphor, and how to make use of it.

Unfortunately for the cause of the superiority of antiquity, whenever you go to hear Berlioz's Funeral March, the least that can happen to you will be to confess that this music is rather better than what they used to give us in Sparta, when we served under Lycurgus; you will think that Apollo, displeased to see us sacrificing to Pallas exclusively, has played us a trick in giving lessons to that *Babylonian*, so that by the exercise of a magnetic and disastrous power over us, he may lead our spirits astray.

And she would prove to the demagogue, out of his own mouth, that everything cannot be reduced to "bread and shoes all round," as the grand desideratum. Give these to men, it will not suffice. The eloquent orator instinctively seeks besides to impart "hallowed emotions and mystic enthusiasm to those who toil and sweat—he teaches them to hope, to dream of God, to take courage and lift themselves above the sickening miseries of human conditions by the thought of a future, chimerical it may be, but strengthening and sublime."

For a period, however, she was too fascinated by the new ideas to judge them, and she straightway sought in her art a means of popularizing them. "These ideas,"

she writes in a later preface to her socialist novel, *Le Péché de M. Antoine,* "at which as yet but a small number of conservative spirits had taken alarm, had as yet only really begun to sprout in a small number of attentive, laborious minds. The Government, so long as no actual form of political application was assumed, was not to be disquieted by theories, and let every man make his own, put forth his dream, and innocently construct his city of the future, by his own fireside, in the garden of his imagination."

She was aware that her readers thought her novels getting more and more tedious, in proportion as she communicated to her fictitious heroes and heroines the preoccupations of her brain, and that she was thus stepping out of the domain of art. But she affirmed she could never help writing of whatever was absorbing her thoughts and feelings at the moment, and must take her chance of boring the public. Fortunately for *Le Péché de M. Antoine,* nature and human nature are here allowed to claim the larger share of our attention, and philosophy is a secondary feature. The scene is laid in the picturesque Marche country on the confines of Berry, a day's journey from Nohant, and we are glad to linger with her along the rocky banks of the Creuse, or among the ruined castles of Crozant and Châteaubrun. The novel contains much that is original and admirable in the drawing of characters of the most opposite classes.

Finally in *Le Meunier d'Angibault,* written as was the last-mentioned work some four or five years later (1844–5), but which may be named here, as making up with *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* the trio of "socialist" novels, the *Tendenz* does not interfere to the detriment of the artistic plan of the book. In it the romantic elements of the remote country nook she inhabited are cleverly brought together, without departing too widely from probability. The dilapidated castle, the picturesque mill, the traditions of brigandage two generations ago, all these were realities familiar to her notice. The painting of the country and country people is masterly; and there is not a passage in the book to offend the taste of the most scrupulous reader. Nor can it be justly impugned on the ground of inculcating disturbing political principles. The personages, in their preference of poverty and obscurity to rank and wealth, may, in the judgment of some, think and conduct themselves like chimerical dreamers, but their actions, however quixotic, concern themselves alone.

But, previous to either of the two novels last-named, she had presented the world with a more ambitious work, whose merit was to compel universal acknowledgment—the most important, in fact, she had produced for eight years.

CHAPTER VII.

CONSUELO—HOME LIFE AT NOHANT.

Consuelo first appeared in the *Revue Indépendante*, 1842–3. This noble book might not be inaptly described as,

> —a whole which, irregular in parts,
> Yet left a grand impression on the mind.

Its reckless proportions naturally "shocked the connoisseurs" among literary critics, especially in her own land; but nevertheless it became, and deservedly, one of her most popular productions, and did more than any other single novel she ever wrote to spread her popularity abroad. If *Indiana, Valentine,* and *Lélia* had never been written to create the fame of George Sand, *Consuelo* would have done so, and may be said to have established it over again, on a better and more lasting basis. Upon so well-known a work lengthened comment here would be superfluous. Originally intended for a novelette,—the opening chapters

appear in the *Revue* under the modest heading, *Consuelo, conte,*—the beginning was so successful, that the author was urged to extend her plan beyond its first proposed limits. The novel is an ephemeral form of art, no doubt, but it is difficult to conceive of a stage of social and intellectual progress when the first part of *Consuelo* will cease to be read with interest and delight.

The heroine once transported from the lagunes of Venice to the frontier of Bohemia and the castle of Rudolstadt, the character of the story becomes less naturalistic; the story-teller loses herself somewhat in subterranean passages and the mazes of adventure generally. She wrote on, she acknowledges, at haphazard, tempted and led away by the new horizons which the artistic and historical researches her work required kept opening to her view. But the powerful contrast between the two pictures—of bright, sunshiny, free, sensuous, careless Venetian folk-life, and of the stern gloom of the mediæval castle, where the more spiritual consolations of existence come into prominence—is singularly effective and original. So also is the charming way in which an incident in the boyhood of young Joseph Haydn is treated by her fancy, in the episode of Consuelo's flight from the castle, when he becomes her fellow-traveller, and their adventures across country are told with such zest and *entrain,* in pages where life-like sketches of character,

such as the good-natured self-indulgent canon, the violent, abandoned Corilla, make us forget the wildest improbabilities of the fiction itself. The concluding portion of the book, again entirely different in frame, with its delineation of art-life in a fashionable capital, Vienna, is as true as it is brilliant. It teems with suggestive ideas on the subject of musical and dramatic art, and with excellently drawn types. The relations of professional and amateur, the contradictions and contentions to which, in a woman's nature, the rival forces of love and of an artistic vocation may give rise, have never been better portrayed in any novel. The heroine, Consuelo, is of course an ideal character; her achievements partake of the marvellous; and there are digressions in the book which are diffuse in the extreme; but nowhere is the author's imagination more attractively displayed and her style more engaging. The tone throughout is noble and pure. To look on *Consuelo* as an agreeable story merely is to overlook the elevation of the moral standard of the book, in which much of its power resides. It marks more strongly than *Mauprat* the change that had come over the spirit of George Sand's compositions.

In the continuation, *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*, which followed immediately in the *Revue Indépendante*, 1843, the novelist strays further and further from reality—the *terra firma* on which her fancy improvises such charming dances. Here she only touches the

ground now and then, and between whiles her imagination asks ours to accompany it on the most extraordinary flights. As a novel of adventure, it is written with unflagging spirit; and in the rites and doctrines of the *Illuminati*, an idealisation of the feature of the secret sects of the last century, she found a new medium of expression for her sentiments regarding the present abuses of society and the need of thorough renovation. Secret societies, at that time, were extremely numerous and active among the Republican workers in France. Madame Sand seems thoroughly to have appreciated their dangers, and has expressly stated that she was no advocate of such sects; that though under a tyranny, such as that which oppressed Germany in the times of which she wrote, they may be a necessity, elsewhere they are an abuse if not a crime. "The custom indeed I have never regarded as applicable for good in our time and our country; I have never believed that it can bring forth anything in future but a dictatorship, and the dictatorial principle is one I have never accepted." (*Histoire de ma Vie.*)

But the romance of the subject was irresistibly tempting to her inventive faculty. "Tell Leroux to send me some more books on freemasonry, if he can find any," she writes to a correspondent at Paris whilst working at the *Comtesse de Rudolstadt* at Nohant; "I am plunged into it over head and ears. Tell

him also that he has there thrown me into an abyss of follies and absurdities, but that I am dabbling about courageously, though prepared to extract nothing but nonsense."

For the musical miracles which it is given to Madame Sand's heroes and heroines to perform at a trifling cost, she may well at this time have come to regard them as almost in the natural order. She had received her second, and her best musical education through the contemplation of original musical genius, of the rarest quality, among her most intimate friends, her constant guests at Paris and Nohant. The vocal and instrumental feats of Consuelo and Count Albert themselves are not more astonishing than the actual recorded achievements of Liszt, pronounced a perfect *virtuoso* at twelve years old,—and no wonder! The boy had so carried away his accompanyists, the band of the Italian opera at Paris, by his performance of the solo in an orchestral piece, that when the moment came for them to strike in, one and all forgot to do so, but remained silent, petrified with amazement. And Liszt when in the full development of his genius had, as we have seen, been the art-comrade of George Sand; he had spent the whole of the summer season of 1837 at Nohant, transcribing Beethoven's symphonies for the pianoforte whilst she wrote her romances; she was familiar with his marvellous improvisations. In her "Trip to Chamounix" (*Lettres d'un Voyageur*, No. VI.) she

has drawn a vivid picture of their extraordinary effect, describing his unrehearsed organ recital in the Cathedral of Freibourg to his little party of travelling companions. Nor was the charm of Chopin's gift less magical. The well-known anecdotes related on this subject are like so many glimpses into a musical paradise, Madame Sand has given us an amusing one herself. It is evening, in her *salon* at Paris. At the piano is Chopin; and she, her son, Eugène Delacroix, and the Polish poet Mickiewicz sit listening whilst the composer, in an inspired mood, is extemporising in the sublimest manner to the little circle. All are in silent raptures; when the servant breaks in with the alarm—the house is on fire. They rush to the room where the flames are and succeed after a time in extinguishing these. Then they perceive that the poet Mickiewicz is missing. On returning to the *salon* they find him as they left him, rapt, entranced, unconscious of the stir around him, of the scare that had driven all the rest from the room. "He did not even know we had gone and left him alone. He was listening to Chopin, he had continued to hear him." Nor could the bewitched poet be brought down from the clouds that evening. He remained deaf to their banter, to Madame Sand's laughing admonition, "Next time I am with you when the house takes fire I must begin by putting you into a safe place, for I see you would get burnt like a mere faggot, before you knew what was going on."

Eugène Delacroix, one of Madame Sand's earliest and most valued friends in the artist-world, and one of the many with whom she enjoyed a long and unclouded friendship, gives in his letters some agreeable pictures of life at Nohant, during his visits there in the successive summers of 1845 and 1846:—

When not assembled together with the rest for dinner, breakfast, a game of billiards, or a walk, you are in your room reading, or lounging on your sofa. Every moment there come in through the window open on the garden, "puffs of music" from Chopin, working away on one side, which mingle with the song of the nightingales and the scent of the roses.

He describes a quiet, monastic-like existence, simple and studious: "We have not even the distraction of neighbours and friends around. In this country everybody stays at home, to look after his oxen and his land. One would become a fossil in a very short time."

The greatest event for the visitor was a village-festival—a wedding or a Saint's day—when the rustic dances went on under the tall elms to the roaring of the bagpipes. Peasant youths and peasant maids joined hands in the *bourrée*, the characteristic dance of the country; now, we fear, surviving in tradition only, but then still popular. The great artist was fired to paint a "Ste. Anne," patron-saint of Nohant, in honour of the place, but his work progressed but slowly. He writes in August, 1846:—"I am frightfully lazy, I can do nothing, I hardly read; and yet the days pass too

quickly, for I must soon renounce this *vie de chanoine*, and return into the furnace of stirring ideas, good and bad. In Berry they have very few ideas, but they do just as well without." Then he adds, "Chopin has been playing Beethoven to me divinely well. That is worth all æstheticism."

Little theatrical entertainments of an original kind, presided over by Madame Sand, and carried out by herself, her children, and their young friends, became in time a prominent feature of life at Nohant. She thus describes their nature and commencements:—

During the long evenings I took it into my head to devise for my family theatricals on the old Italian pattern—*commedia dell' arte*—plays in which the dialogue, itself extemporised, yet follows the outlines of a written plan, placarded behind the scenes. It is something like the charades acted in society, the development of which depends on the talent contributed by the actors. It was with these that we began, but little by little the word of the charade disappeared. We acted wild *saynètes*, afterwards comedies of plot and intrigue, finally dramas of event and emotion.

All began with pantomime; and this was Chopin's invention. He sat at the piano and extemporised, whilst the young people acted scenes in dumb show and danced comic ballets. These charming improvisations turned the children's heads and made their legs nimble. He led them just as he chose, making them pass, according to his fancy, from the amusing to the severe, from burlesque to solemnity—now graceful, now impassioned. We invented all kinds of costumes, so as to play different characters in succession. No sooner did the artist see them appear than he adapted his theme and rhythm to the parts wonderfully. This would be repeated for two or three evenings; after which the *maestro*, departing for Paris, would leave us quite excited, exalted, determined not to let the spark be lost with which he had electrified us.

Chopin was possessed of much dramatic talent him-

self, and was an admirable mimic. When a boy it had been said of him that he was born to be a great actor. His capacity for facial expression was something extraordinary; he often amused his friends by imitations of fellow-musicians, reproducing their manner and gestures to the life; so well as actually on more than one occasion to take in the spectator.

Madame Sand thus gives account of the even tenor of her way, in a letter of September 1845:—

I have been in Paris till June, and since then am at Nohant until the winter, as usual; for henceforward my life is ruled as regularly as music paper. I have written two or three novels, one of which is just going to appear.

My son is still thin and delicate, but otherwise well. He is the best being, the gentlest, most equable, industrious, simple-minded, and straightforward ever seen. Our characters, like our hearts, agree so well that we can hardly live a day apart. He is entering his twenty-third year, Solange her eighteenth. We have our ways of merriment, not noisy, but sustained, which bring our ages nearer together, and when we have been working hard all the week we allow ourselves, by way of a grand holiday, to go and eat our cake out of doors some way off, in a wood or an old ruin, with my brother, who is like a sturdy peasant, full of fun and good nature, and who dines with us every day, seeing that he lives not two miles off. Such are our grand pranks.

Sometimes these little outings would originate a novel, as with the *Meunier d'Angibault*, which she ascribes to "a walk, a discovery, a day of leisure, an hour of idleness." On a ramble with her children she came upon what she calls "a nook in a wild paradise"; a mill, whose owner had allowed everything to grow around the sluices that chose to spring up, briar and

alder, oaks and rushes. The stream, left to follow its devices, had forced its way through the sand and the grass in a network of little waterfalls, covered below in the summer time with thick tufts of aquatic plants.

It was enough, the seed was sown and the fruit resulted. "The apple falling from the tree led Newton to the discovery of one of the grand laws of the universe. . . . In scientific works of genius, reflection derives the causes of things from a single fact. In art's humbler fancies, that isolated fact is dressed and completed in a dream."

The picture given by Madame Sand and her guests of these years of her life is charming enough, and in certain ways seems an ideal kind of existence, amid beloved children, friends, pleasant and calm surroundings, and the sweets of successful literary activity. But if it had its bright lights, it had also its deep shadows. For every fresh pleasure and interest crowded into her existence, there entered a fresh source of anxiety and trouble. Age, in bringing her more power of endurance, had not blunted her sensibilities. As usual with the strongest natures in their hours of depression—and none so strong as to escape these—she could then look for no help except from herself. Those accustomed, like her, to shirk no responsibility, no burden, to invite others to lean on them, and to ask no support, if their fortitude gives way find the allowance, help and

sympathy so easily accorded to their weaker fellow-creatures nowhere ready for them. The exclamation wrung from one of the characters in a later work of Madame Sand's may be but a faithful echo of the cry of her own nature in some moment of mental torment. "Let me be weak; I have been seeming to be strong for so long a time!"

Chopin, though the study of his genius had freshly inspired her own and greatly extended her comprehension of musical art, was a being to whom the burden of his own life was too painful to allow him to lighten the troubles of another; a partial invalid, a prey to nervous irritation, he was dependent on her to soothe and cheer him at the best of times, and to be nurse and secretary besides when he was prostrated by illness or despondency. One is loth to call selfish a nature so attractive in its refinement, so unhappy in its over-susceptibility. But it is obvious that such a one might easily become a trial to those he loved. With all its vigour her nervous system could not escape the exhaustion and disturbance that attend on incessant brain-work. "Those who have nothing to do," she remarks, "when they see artists produce with facility, are ready to wonder at how few hours, how few instants, these can reserve for themselves. For such do not know how these gymnastics of the imagination, if they do not affect your health, yet leave an excitation of your nerves, an obsession of mental pictures, a

languor of spirit, that forbid you to carry on any other kind of work."

Although her constitution was even stronger than in her youth, she had for some years been subject to severe attacks of neuralgia. "Madame Sand suffers terribly from violent headaches and pain in her eyes," remarks Delacroix, in one of the letters above quoted, "which she takes upon herself to surmount as far as possible, with a great effort, so as not to distress us by what she goes through." Her habit of writing principally at night and contenting herself with the least possible allowance of repose, few could have persisted in for so long without breaking down. For many years she never took more than four hours' sleep. The strain began to tell on her eye-sight at last, and already in a letter of 1842 she speaks of being temporarily compelled to suspend this practice of night-work, to her great regret, as in the daylight hours she was never secure from interruption. Only her abnormal power of activity and of bearing fatigue could have enabled her to fulfil so strenuously the responsibilities she had undertaken to her children, her private friends, and the public. The pressure of literary work was incessant, and whatever her dislike to accounts and arithmetic she is said to have fulfilled her engagements to editors and publishers with the regularity and punctuality of a notary. Her large acquaintance, relations with various classes, various projects, literary, political, and philanthropical,

involved an immense amount of serious correspondence in addition to that arising from the postal persecution from which no celebrity escapes. Ladies wrote to consult her on sentimental subjects—to inquire of her, as of an oracle, whether they should bestow their heart, their hand, or both, upon their suitors; poets, to solicit her patronage and criticism. In the course of a single half-year, 153 manuscripts were sent her for perusal! She replied when it seemed fit, conscientiously and ungrudgingly; but experience had made her less expansive than formerly to those whose overtures she felt to be prompted by curiosity or some such idle motive, in the absence of any sympathy for her ways of thinking. "I am not to be caught in my words with indifferent persons," she writes to M. Charles Duvernet, describing how, when in her friend Madame Marliani's *salon* in Paris she heard herself and her political allies or their opinions attacked, she was not to be provoked into argument or indignant denial, but went on quietly with her work of hemming pocket-handkerchiefs. "To such people one speaks through the medium of the Press. If they will not attend, no matter."

Her sex, her anomalous position, her freedom of expression and action, exposed her to an extent quite exceptional, even for a public character, to the shafts of malice and slander. Accustomed to have to brave the worst from such attacks, she might and did arrive

at treating them with an indifference that was not, however, in her nature, which shrank from the observation and personal criticism of the vulgar.

To a young poet of promise in whose welfare she took interest she writes, August 1842:—

Never show my letters except to your mother, your wife, or your greatest friend. It is a shy habit, a mania I have to the last degree. The idea that I am not writing for those alone to whom I write, or for those who love them thoroughly, would freeze my heart and my hand directly. Everyone has a fault. Mine is a misanthropy in my outward habits—for all that I have no passion left in me but the love of my fellow-creatures; but with the small services that my heart and my faith can render in this world, my personality has nothing to do. Some people have grieved me very much, unconsciously, by talking and writing about me personally and my doings, even though favourably, and meaning well. Respect this malady of spirit.

Madame Sand, being naturally undemonstrative, was commonly more or less tongue-tied and chilled in the presence of a stranger, and she had a frank dread of introductions and first interviews, even when the acquaintance was one she desired to make. Sometimes she asks her friends to prepare such new comers for receiving an unfavourable first impression, and to beg them not to be unduly prejudiced thereby. Such a one would find the persecution of lion-hunters intolerable, and now and then this drove her to extremities. Great must, indeed, have been the wrath of one of these irrepressibles who, more obstinate than the rest, failing by fair means to get an introduction to George Sand, calmly pushed his way into Nohant unauthorised by

anyone, whereupon her friends conspired to serve him the trick it must be owned he deserved; and which we give in the words of Madame Sand, writing to the Comtesse d'Agoult. The story is told also by Liszt in his letters :—

M. X. is ushered into my room. A respectable-looking person there receives him. She was about forty years of age, but you might give her sixty at a pinch. She had had beautiful teeth, but had got none left. All passes away! She had been rather good-looking, but was so no longer. All changes! Her figure was corpulent, and her hands were soiled. Nothing is perfect!

She was clad in a grey woollen gown spotted with black, and lined with scarlet. A silk handkerchief was negligently twisted round her black hair. Her shoes were faulty, but she was thoroughly dignified. Now and then she seemed on the point of putting an *s* or a *t* in the wrong place, but she corrected herself gracefully, talked of her literary works, of her excellent friend M. Rollinat, of the talents of her visitor which had not failed to reach her ears, though she lived in complete retirement, overwhelmed with work. M. G. brought her a foot-stool, the children called her mamma, the servants Madame.

She had a gracious smile, and much more distinguished manners than that fellow George Sand. In a word X. was happy and proud of his visit. Perched in a big chair, with beaming aspect, arm extended, speech abundant, there he stayed for a full quarter of an hour in ecstasies, and then took leave, bowing down to the ground to—Sophie!

It was the maid that had thus been successfully passed off as the mistress, who with her whole household enjoyed a long and hearty laugh at the expense of the departed unbidden guest. "M. X. has gone off to Châteauroux," she concludes, "on purpose to give an account of his interview with me, and to describe me personally in all the *cafés*."

This anecdote however belongs to a much earlier

period of her life, the year 1837. Of her cordiality and kindliness to those who approached her in a right spirit of sincerity and simplicity, many have spoken. For English readers we cannot do better than quote Mr. Mathew Arnold's interesting account, given in the *Fortnightly*, 1877, of his visit to her in August 1846. Desirous of seeing the green lanes of Berry, the rocky heaths of Bourbonnais, the descriptions of which in *Valentine* and *Jeanne* had charmed him so strongly, the traveller chose a route that brought him to within a few miles of her home:—"I addressed to Madame Sand," he tells us, "the sort of letter of which she must in her lifetime have had scores—a letter conveying to her, in bad French, the youthful and enthusiastic homage of a foreigner who had read her works with delight." She responded by inviting him to call at Nohant. He came and joined a breakfast-party that included Madame Sand and her son and daughter, Chopin, and other friends—Mr. Arnold being placed next to the hostess. He says of her:—

As she spoke, her eyes, head, bearing were all of them striking, but the main impression she made was one of simplicity, frank, cordial simplicity. After breakfast she led the way into the garden, asked me a few kind questions about myself and my plans, gathered a flower or two and gave them to me, shook hands heartily at the gate, and I saw her no more.

During the eight years of successful literary activity, lying between Madame Sand's return from Majorca and the Revolution of February 1848, the profits of her work

had, after the first, enabled her freely to spend the greater part of the year at Nohant, and to provide a substantial dowry for her daughter. But the amassing of wealth suited neither her taste nor her principles. She writes to her poet-protégé M. Poncy in September 1845:—

We are in easy circumstances, which enables us to do away with poverty in our own neighbourhood, and if we feel the sorrow of being unable to do away with that which desolates the world—a deep sorrow, especially at my age, when life has no intoxicating personality left, and one sees plainly the spectacle of society in its injustices and frightful disorder—at least we know nothing of *ennui*, of restless ambition and selfish passions. We have a sort of relative happiness, and my children enjoy it with the simplicity of their age.

As for me, I only accept it in trembling, for all happiness is like a theft in this ill-regulated world of men, where you cannot enjoy your ease or your liberty, except to the detriment of your fellow-creatures—by the force of things, the law of inequality, that odious law, those odious combinations, the thought of which poisons my sweetest domestic joys and revolts me against myself at every moment. I can only find consolation in vowing to go on writing as long as I have a breath of life left in me, against the infamous maxim, "*Chacun chez soi, chacun pour soi.*" Since all I can do is to make this protest, make it I shall, in every key.

Her republican friends in Berry had founded in 1844 a local journal for the spread of liberal ideas—such as Lamartine at the time was supporting at Macon. Madame Sand readily contributed her services to a cause where she laboured for the enlightenment of the masses on all subjects—truth, justice, religion, liberty, fraternity, duties, and rights. The government of Louis Philippe, so long as such utterances attacked no definite institution, allowed an almost illimitable freedom in expression of opinion. The result was that thought had

advanced so far ahead of action that social philosophers had grown to argue as though practical obstacles had no existence—to be rudely reminded of their consequence, when brought to the front in 1848, and acting somewhat too much as if on that supposition.

It is impossible not to make concerning Madame Sand the reflection made on other foremost workers in the same cause of organic social reform—namely, that her character and her instincts were in curious opposition to her ideas. What was said by Madame d'Agoult of Louis Blanc applies with even greater force to George Sand: "The sentiment of personality was never stronger than in this opposer of individualism, communist theories had for their champion one most unfit to be absorbed into the community." For no length of time was the idea of "communism" accepted, and never was it advocated by her except in the most restricted sense. The land-hunger, or rather land-greed, of the small proprietors in her neighbourhood had, it is true, given her a certain disgust for these contested possessions. But from the preference of a small child or a garden of its own however small, to another's however large, she characteristically infers the instinct of property as a law of nature it were preposterous to disallow, and furthermore she lays down as an axiom that, "in treating the communistic idea it is necessary first to distinguish what is essential in liberty and work to the complete existence of the

individual, from what is collective." When forced by actual experience to point out what she holds to be the rightful application of the idea, she limits it to voluntary association; and she hoped great things from the co-operative principle, as tending to eliminate the ills of extreme inequalities in the social structure, and to preserve everything in it that is worth preserving.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOVELIST AND POLITICIAN.

By her novels classed as "socialistic," Madame Sand had, as we have seen, incurred the public hostility of those whom her doctrines alarmed. And yet her "communist" heroes and heroines are the most pacific and inoffensive of social influences. They merely aspire to isolate themselves, and personally to practise principles and virtues of the highest order; unworldliness such as, if general, might indeed turn the earth into the desired Utopia. Nothing can be said against their example, unless that it is too good, and that there is little hope of its being widely followed.

Charges of another sort, no less bitter, and though exaggerated somewhat better founded, assailed her after the appearance in 1847 of *Lucrezia Floriani*, a novel of character-analysis entirely, but into which she was accused of having introduced an unflattering portrait of Frédéric Chopin, whose long and long-

requited attachment to her entitled him to better treatment at her hands.

With respect to the general question of such alleged fictitious reproductions, few novelists escape getting into trouble on this head. It has been aptly observed by Mr. Hamerton that the usual procedure of the reading public in such cases is to fix on some real personage as distinctly unlike the character in the book as possible, for the original, and then to complain of the unfaithfulness of the resemblance. Madame Sand's taste and higher art-instincts would have revolted against the practice—now unfortunately no longer confined to inferior writers—of forcing attention to a novel by making it the gibbet of well-known personalities, with little or no disguise; and Chopin himself, morbidly sensitive and fanciful though he was, read her work without perceiving in it any intention there to portray their relations to each other, which, indeed, had differed essentially from those of the personages in the romance.

Lucrezia Floriani is a *cantatrice* of genius, who whilst still young has retired from the world, indifferent to fame, and effectually disenchanted—so she believes—with passion. Despite an experience strange and stormy, even for a member of her Bohemian profession, Lucrezia has miraculously preserved intact her native nobility of soul, and appears as a meet object of worship to a fastidious young prince on his travels,

who becomes passionately enamoured of her. He over-persuades Lucrezia into trusting that they will find their felicity in each other. Their happiness is of the briefest duration, owing to the unreasonable character of the prince, who leads the actress a miserable life; his love taking the form of petty tyranny and retrospective jealousy. After long years of this material and moral captivity, the heroic Lucrezia fades and dies.

Not content with identifying the intolerable, though it must be owned severely-tested Prince Karol with Chopin, imaginative writers have gone so far as to assert that the book was conceived and written from an express design on the novelist's part to bring about the breach of a link she was beginning to find irksome!

Madame Sand has described how it was written—as are all such works of imagination—in response to a sort of "call"—some striking yet indefinable quality in one idea among the host always floating through the brain of the artist, that makes him instantly seize it and single it out as inviting to art-treatment. It would be preposterous to doubt her statement. But whether the inspiration ought not to have been sacrificed is another question. Her gift was her good angel and her evil angel as well, but in any case something of her despot. Here, assuredly, it ruled her ill. It is indisputable that, as she has pointed out, the sad history of the attach-

ment of Lucrezia the actress and Karol the prince deviates too widely from that which was supposed to have originated it for just comparisons to be drawn between the two, that Karol is not a genius, and therefore has none of the rights of genius—including, we presume, the right to be a torment to those around him —that to talk of a portrait of Chopin without his genius is a contradiction in terms, that he never suspected the likeness assumed until it was insinuated to him, and so forth. But there remains this, that in the work of imagination she here presented to the public there was enough of reality interwoven to make the world hasten to identify or confound Prince Karol with Chopin. This might have been a foregone conclusion, as also that Chopin, the most sensitive of mortals, would be infinitely pained by the inferences that would be drawn. Perhaps if only as a genius he had the right to be spared such an infliction, and one must wish it could have appeared in this light to Madame Sand. It seems as though it were impossible for the author to put himself at the point of view of the reader in such matters. The divine spark itself, that quickens certain faculties, deadens others. When Goethe, in *Werther,* dragged the private life of his intimate friends the Kestners into publicity, and by falsifying the character of the one and misrepresenting the conduct of the other, in obedience to the requisitions of art, exposed his beloved Charlotte and her

husband to all manner of annoyances, it never seems to have entered into his head beforehand but that they would be delighted by what he had done. Nor could he get over his surprise that such petty vexations on their part should not be merged in a proud satisfaction at the literary memorial thus raised by him to their friendly intercourse! This seems incredible, and yet his sincerity leaves no room for doubt.

Madame Sand's transgressions on this head, though few, have obtained great notoriety, on account of the extraordinary celebrity of two of the personages that suggested characters she has drawn. To the supposed originals, however obscure, the mortification is the same. But what often passes uncommented on when the individuals said to be traduced are unknown to fame, sets the whole world talking when one of the first musicians or poets of the century is involved; so that Madame Sand has incurred more censure than other novelists, though she has deserved it more rarely. But regret remains that for the sake of *Lucrezia Floriani,* one of the least pleasant though by no means the least powerful of her novels, she should have exposed herself to the charge of unkindness to one who had but a short while to live.

Other causes had latterly been combining to lead to differences of which it would certainly be unfair to lay the whole blame on Madame Sand. The tie of personal attachment between Chopin and herself was not asso-

ciated by identity of outward interests or even of cares and family affections, such as, in the case of husband and wife, make self-sacrifice possible under conditions which might otherwise be felt unbearable, and help to tide over crises of impatience or wrong. Madame Sand's children were now grown up; cross-influences could not but arise, hard to conciliate. Without accrediting Chopin with the self-absorption of Prince Karol, it is easy to see here, in a situation somewhat anomalous, elements of probable discord. It was impossible that he should any longer be a first consideration; impossible that he should not resent it.

For some years his state of health had been getting worse and worse, and his nervous susceptibilities correspondingly intensified. Madame Sand betrayed some impatience at last of what she had long borne uncomplainingly, and their good understanding was broken. As was natural, the breach was the more severely felt by Chopin; but that it was of an irreparable nature, one is at liberty to doubt. He bitterly regretted what he had lost, for which not all the attentions showered on him by his well-wishers could afford compensation, as his letters attest.

But outward circumstances prolonged the estrangement till it was too late. They met but once after the quarrel, and that was in company in March 1848. Madame Sand would at once have made some approach, but Chopin did not then respond to the appeal; and

the reconciliation both perhaps desired was never to take place. Political events had intervened to widen the gap between their paths. Chopin had neither part nor lot in the revolutionary movement that just then was throwing all minds and lives into a ferment, and which was completely to engross Madame Sand's energies for many months to come. It drove him away to England, and he only returned to Paris, in 1849, to die.

In May 1847 the tranquillity of life at Nohant had been varied by a family event, the marriage of Madame Sand's daughter Solange with the sculptor Clésinger. The remainder of the twelvemonth was spent in the country, apparently with very little anticipation on Madame Sand's part that the breaking of the political storm, that was to draw her into its midst, was so near.

The new year was to be one of serious agitations, different to any that had yet entered into her experience. Political enterprise for the time cast all purely personal interests and emotions into the background. "I have never known how to do anything by halves," she says of herself very truly; and whatever may be thought of the tendency of her political influence and the manner of its exertion, no one can tax her with sparing herself in a contest to which, moreover, she came disinterested; vanity and ambition having, in one of her sex, nothing to gain by it. But in political matters it

seems hard for a poet to do right. If, like Goethe, he holds aloof in great crises, he is branded for it as a traitor and a bad patriot. The battle of Leipzig is being fought, and he sits tranquilly writing the epilogue for a play. If, like George Sand, he throws the whole weight of his enthusiastic eloquence into what he believes to be the right scale, it is ten to one that his power, which knows nothing of caution and patience, may do harm to the cause he has at heart.

Madame Sand rested her hopes for a better state of things, for the redemption of France from political corruption, for the amelioration of the condition of the working classes, and reform of social institutions in general, on the advent to power of those placed at the head of affairs by the collapse of the Government of Louis Philippe, a crisis long threatened, long prepared, and become inevitable.

"The whole system," wrote Heine prophetically of the existing monarchy, five years before its fall, "is not worth a charge of powder, if indeed some day a charge of powder does not blow it up." February 1848 saw the explosion, the flight of the Royal Family, and the formation of a Provisional Government, with Lamartine at its head.

It is hard to realise in the present day, when we contemplate these events through the sobering light of the deplorable sequel, how immense and wide-spreading was the enthusiasm that at this particular

juncture seemed to put the fervent soul of a George Sand or an Armand Barbès into the most lukewarm and timid. "More than one," writes Madame d'Agoult, "who for the last twenty years had been scoffing at every grand thought, let himself be won by the general emotion." The prevailing impression can have fallen little short of the conviction that a sort of millennium was at hand for mankind in general and the French in particular, and that all human ills would disappear because a bad government had been got rid of, and that without such scenes of blood and strife as had disfigured previous revolutions.

The first task was firmly to establish a better one in its place. Madame Sand, though with a strong perception of the terrible difficulties besetting a ministry which, to quote her own words, would need, in order to acquit itself successfully, "the genius of a Napoleon and the heart of Christ," never relaxed an instant in the enforcement both by example and exhortation of her conviction that it was the duty of all true patriots and philanthropists to consecrate their energies to the cause of the new republic.

"My heart is full and my head on fire," she writes to a fellow-worker in the same cause. "All my physical ailments, all my personal sorrows are forgotten. I live, I am strong, active, I am not more than twenty years old." The exceptional situation of the country was one in which, according to her opinion, it behoved

men to be ready not only with loyalty and devotion, but with fanaticism if needed. She worked hard with her son and her local allies at the ungrateful task of revolutionising Le Berry, which, she sighs, "is very drowsy." In March she came up to Paris and placed her services as journalist and partizan generally at the disposal of Ledru-Rollin, Minister of the Interior under the new Government. "Here am I already doing the work of a statesman," she writes from Paris to her son at Nohant, March 24. Her indefatigable energy, enabling her as it did to disdain repose, was perhaps the object of envy to the statesmen themselves. At their disgust when kept up all night by the official duties of their posts, she laughs without mercy. Night and day her pen was occupied, now drawing up circulars for the administration, now lecturing the people in political pamphlets addressed to them. To the *Bulletin de la République,* a Government journal started with the laudable purpose of preserving a clear understanding between the mass of the people in the provinces and the central government, she became a leading contributor. For the festal invitation performances given to the people at the "Théâtre de la République," where Rachel sang the Marseillaise and acted in *Les Horaces,* Madame Sand wrote a little "occasional" prologue, *Le Roi Attend,* a new and democratic version of Molière's *Impromptu de Versailles.* The outline is as follows:—Molière is discovered impatient and

uneasy; the King waits, and the comedians are not ready. He sinks asleep, and has a vision, in which the muse emerges out of a cloud, escorted by Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespeare, and Beaumarchais, to each of whom are assigned a few lines—where possible, lines of their own—in praise of equality and fraternity. They vanish and Molière awakes; his servant announces to him that the King waits—but the King this time is, of course, the people, to whom Molière now addresses his flattering speech in turn.

But the fervour of heroism that fired everybody in the first days of successful revolution, that made the leaders disinterested, the masses well-behaved, reasonable, and manageable, was for the majority a flash only; and the dreamed-of social ideal, touched for a moment, was to recede again into the far distance. It was Madame Sand's error, and no ignoble one, to entertain the belief that a nation could safely be trusted to the guidance of a force so variable and uncontrollable as enthusiasm, and that the principle of self-devotion could be relied upon as a motive power. The divisions, intrigues, and fatal complications that quickly arose at head-quarters confirmed her first estimation of the practical dangers ahead. She clung to her belief in the sublime virtues of the masses, and that they would prove themselves grander, finer, more generous than all the mighty and the learned ones upon earth. But each of the popular leaders in turn was

pronounced by her tried and found wanting. None of the party chiefs presented the desirable combination of perfect heroism and political genius. Michel, the apostle who of old had converted her to the cause, she had long scorned as a deserter. Leroux, in the moment of action, was a nonentity. Barbès "reasons like a saint," she observes, "that is to say, very ill as regards the things of this world." Lamartine was a vain trimmer; Louis Blanc, a sectarian; Ledru-Rollin, a weathercock. "It is the characters that transgress," she complains naïvely, as one after the other disappointed her. Her own shortcomings on the score of patience and prudence were, it must be owned, no less grave. Her clear-sightedness was unaccompanied by the slightest dexterity of action. Years before, in one of the *Lettres d'un Voyageur* she had passed a criticism on herself as a political worker, the accuracy of which she made proof of when carried into the vortex. "I am by nature poetical, but not legislative, warlike, if required, but never parliamentary. By first persuading me and then giving me my orders some use may be made of me, but I am not fit for discovering or deciding anything."

Such an influence, important for raising an agitation, was null for controlling and directing the forces thus set in motion. In the application of the theories she had accepted she was as weak and obscure as she was emphatic and eloquent in the preaching of them.

Little help could she afford the republican leaders in dealing with the momentous question how to fulfil the immense but confused aspirations they had raised, how to show that their principles could answer the necessities of the moment.

The worst perhaps that can be said of Madame Sand's political utterances is that they encouraged the people in their false belief—which belief she shared—that the social reforms so urgently needed could be worked rapidly by the Government, provided only it were willing. Over-boldness of expression on the part of advanced sections only increased the timidity and irresolution of action complained of in the administration. As the ranks of the Ministry split up into factions, Madame Sand attached herself to the party of Ledru-Rollin—in whom at that time she had confidence,—a party that desired to see him at the head of affairs, and that included Jules Favre, Étienne Arago, and Armand Barbès. No more zealous political partizan and agent than Madame Sand. The purpose in view was to preserve a cordial *entente* between these trusted chiefs and the masses whose interests they represented and on whose support they relied. To this end she got together meetings of working men at her temporary Parisian abode, addressing them in speech and in print, and seemingly blind in the heat of the struggle to the enormous danger of playing with the unmanageable, unreasoning instincts of a crowd.

She still cherished the chimera dear to her imagination —the prospective vision of the French people assembling itself in large masses, and deliberately and pacifically giving expression to its wishes!

Into the *Bulletin de la République* there crept soon a tone of impatience and provocation, improper and dangerous in an official organ. The 16th Number, which appeared on April 16, at a moment when the pending general elections seemed likely to be overruled by reactionaries, contained the startling declaration that if the result should thus dissatisfy the Paris people, these would manifest their will once more, by adjourning the decision of a false national representation.

This sentence, which came from the pen of Madame Sand, was interpreted into a threat of intimidation from the party that would make Ledru-Rollin dictator, and created a considerable stir. There was, indeed, no call for a fresh brand of discord in the republican ranks. Almost simultaneously came popular demonstrations of a menacing character. Ledru-Rollin disavowed the offending Bulletin; but the growing uneasiness of the *bourgeoisie*, the unruly discontent among the workmen, the Government, embarrassed and utterly disorganized, was powerless to allay. Madame Sand began to perceive that the republic of her dreams, the "republican republic," was a forlorn hope, though still unconscious that even heavier obstacles to progress existed in the governed many

than in the incapacity or personal ambition of the governing few. She writes to her son from Paris, April 17 :—

I am sad, my boy. If this goes on, and in some sense there should be no more to be done, I shall return to Nohant to console myself by being with you. I shall stay and see the National Assembly, after which I think I shall find nothing more here that I can do.

At the *Fête de la Fraternité,* April 20th, the spectacle of a million of souls putting aside and agreeing to forget all dissensions, all wrongs in the past and fears for the future, and uniting in a burst of joyous exultation, filled her with enthusiasm and renewed hope. But the demonstration of the 15th of May, of which she was next a spectator, besides its mischievous effect in alarming the quiet classes and exciting the agitators afresh, gave fatal evidence of the national disorganization and uncontrollable confusion everywhere prevailing, that had doomed the Republic from the hour of its birth.

Madame Sand, though she strenuously denied any participation or sympathy with this particular manifestation, was closely associated in the public mind with those who had aided and abetted the uprising. During the gathering of the populace, which she had witnessed, mingling unrecognised among the crowd, a female orator haranguing the mob from the lower windows of a *café* was pointed out to her, and she was assured that it was George Sand. During the repressive measures the administration was led to take she felt

uncertain whether the arrest of Barbès might not be followed by her own. Some of her friends advised her to seek safety in Italy, where at that time the partisans of liberty were more united and sanguine. She turned a deaf ear. But she was severed now from all influential connection with those in authority. Before the end of May she left for Nohant, with her hopes for the rapid regeneration of her country on the wane. "I am afraid for the future," she writes to the imprisoned Barbès, shortly after these events. ". . . I suffer for those who do harm and allow harm to be done without understanding it. . . . I see nothing but ignorance and moral weakness preponderating on the face of the globe."

Through the medium of the Press, notably of the journal *La Vraie République,* she continued to give plain expression to her sentiments, regardless of the political enmities she might excite, and of the personal mortification to which she was exposed, even at Nohant, which with its inmates had recently become the mark for petty hostile "demonstrations." Alluding to these, she writes:—

> Here in this Berry, so romantic, so gentle, so calm and good, in this land I love so tenderly, and where I have given sufficient proof to the poor and uneducated that I know my duties towards them, I myself in particular am looked upon as the enemy of the human race; and if the Republic has not kept its promises, it is I, clearly, who am the cause.

The term "communist," caught up and passed from

mouth to mouth, was flung at Madame Sand and her son by the peasants, whose ideas as to its significance were not a little wild. "A pack of idiots," she writes to Madame Marliani, "who threaten to come and set fire to Nohant. Brave they are not, neither morally nor physically; and when they come this way and I walk through the midst of them they take off their hats; but when they have gone by they summon courage to shout, 'Down with the communists.'"

The ingratitude of many who again and again had received succour from her and hers, she might excuse on account of their ignorance, but the extent of their ignorance was an obstacle to immediate progress whose weight she had miscalculated.

"I shall keep my faith," she writes to Joseph Mazzini at this crisis—"the idea, pure and bright, the eternal truth will ever remain for me in my heaven, unless I go blind. But hope is a belief in the near triumph of one's faith. I should not be sincere if I said that this state of mind had not been modified in me during these last months."

The terrible insurrection of June followed, and overwhelmed her for the time. It was not only that her nature, womanly and poetical, had the greatest horror of bloodshed. The spectacle of the republicans slaughtering each other, of the evil passions stirred, the frightful anarchy, ended but at a frightful cost, the complete extinction of all hopes,—nothing left rampant

but fear, rancour and distrust,—was heartrending to her whose heart had been thrown into the national troubles.

Great was the panic in Berry, an after-clap of the disturbances in the capital. Madame Sand's position became more unpleasant than ever. She describes herself as "*blasée d'outrages*—threatened perpetually by the coward hatreds and imbecile terrors of country places." But to all this she was well-nigh insensible in her despair over the public calamities oppressing her nation —the end of all long-struggling aspirations in "frightful confusion, complete moral anarchy, a morbid condition, in most which the courageous of us lost heart and wished for death."

"You say that the *bourgeoisie* prevails," she writes to Mazzini, in September 1848, "and that thus it is quite natural that selfishness should be the order of the day. But why does the *bourgeoisie* prevail, whilst the people is sovereign, and the principle of its sovereignty, universal suffrage, is still standing? We must open our eyes at last, and the vision of reality is horrible. The majority of the French people is blind, credulous, ignorant, ungrateful, wicked, and stupid; it is *bourgeoise* itself!"

Under no conceivable circumstances is it likely that Madame Sand would not very soon have become disgusted with active politics, for which her temperament unfitted her in every respect. Impetuous and uncom-

promisingly sincere, she was predestined to burn her fingers; proud and independent, to become something of a scape-goat, charged with all the follies and errors which she repudiated, as well as with those for which she was more or less directly responsible.

For some time to come she remained in comparative seclusion at Nohant. She had not ceased her propaganda, though obliged to conduct it with greater circumspection. After the horrors of civil warfare had come the cry for order at any price, and France had declared for the rule of Louis Bonaparte. During the course of events that consolidated his power, Madame Sand withdrew more and more from the strife of political parties. She had been, and we shall find her again, inclined to hope for better things for France from its new master than time showed to be in store. Other republicans besides herself had been disposed to build high their hopes of this future "saviour of society" in his youthful days of adversity and mysterious obscurity. When in confinement at the fortress of Ham in 1844, Louis Napoleon sent to George Sand his work on the Extinction of Pauperism. She wrote back a flattering letter in which, however, with characteristic sincerity, she is careful to remind him that the party to which she belonged could never acknowledge any sovereign but the people; that this they considered to be incompatible with the sovereignty of one man; that no miracle, no personification of popular genius in a

single individual, could prove to them the right of that individual to sovereign power.

Since then she had seen the people supreme, and been forced to own that they knew not what they wanted nor whither they were going, divided in mind, ferocious in action. Among the leaders, she had seen some infatuated by the allurements of personal popularity, and the rest showing, by their inability to cope with the perplexities of administrative government, that so far philosophical speculations were of no avail in the actual solution of social problems.

The result of her disenchantment was in no degree the overthrow of her political faith. A conviction was dawning on her that her social ideal was absolutely impracticable in any future that she and her friends could hope to live to see. But the belief on which she founded her social religion was one in which she never wavered; a certainty that a progress, the very idea of which now seemed chimerical, would some day appear to all as a natural thing, nay that the stream of tendency would carry men towards this goal in spite of themselves.

CHAPTER IX.

PASTORAL TALES.

"So you thought," wrote Madame Sand to a political friend in 1849, "that I was drinking blood out of the skulls of aristocrats. Not I! I am reading Virgil and learning Latin." And her best propaganda, as by and by she came to own, was not that carried on in journals such as *La Vraie République* and *La Cause du Peuple.* Through her works of imagination she has exercised an influence more powerful and universal, if indirect.

Among the more than half a hundred romances of George Sand there stands out a little group of three, belonging to the period we have now reached—the *mezzo cammin* of her life—creations in a special style, and over which the public voice, whether of fastidious critics or general readers, in France or abroad, has been and remains unanimous in praise.

In these, her pastoral tales, she hit on a new and happy vein which she was peculiarly qualified to work, combining as she did, intimate knowledge of French peasant life with sympathetic interest in her subject and lively poetic fancy. Here she affronts no prejudices, advances no startling theories, handles no subtle, treacherous social questions, and to these compositions in a perfectly original *genre* she brought the freshness of genius which "age cannot wither," together with the strength and finish of a practised hand.

Peasants had figured as accessories in her earlier works. The rustic hermit and philosopher, Patience, and Marcasse the rat-catcher, in *Mauprat,* are noteworthy examples. In 1844 had appeared *Jeanne,* with its graceful dedication to Françoise Meillant, the unlettered peasant-girl who may have suggested the work she could not read—one of a family of rural proprietors, spoken of by Madame Sand in a letter of 1843 as a fine survival of a type already then fast vanishing—of patriarchally constituted family-life, embodying all that was grand and simple in the forms of the olden time.

In *Jeanne,* Madame Sand had first ventured to make a peasant-girl the central figure of her novel, though still so far deferring to the received notions of what was essential in order to interest the "gentle" reader as to surround her simple heroine with personages of rank and education. Jeanne herself, moreover, is an

exceptional and a highly idealized type—as it were a sister to Joan of Arc, not the inspired warrior-maid, but the visionary shepherdess of the Vosges. Yet the creation is sufficiently real. The author had observed how favourable was the life of solitude and constant communion with nature led by many of these country children in their scattered homesteads, to the development of remarkable and tenacious individuality. So with the strange and poetical Jeanne, too innately refined to prosper in her rough human environment, yet too fixedly simple to fare much better in more cultivated circles. She is the victim of a sort of celestial stupidity we admire and pity at once. In this study of a peasant heroine resides such charm as the book possesses, and the attempt was to lead on the author to the productions above alluded to, *La Mare au Diable, François le Champi,* and *La Petite Fadette.* Of this popular trio the first had been published already two years before the Revolution, in 1846; the second was appearing in the Feuilleton of the *Journal des Débats* at the very moment of the breaking of the storm, which interrupted its publication awhile. When those tumultuous months were over and Madame Sand, thrown out of the hurly-burly of active politics, was brought back by the course of events to Nohant, she seems to have taken up her pen very much where she had laid it down. The break in her ordinary round of work made by the excitements of active

statesmanship was hardly perceptible, and in 1849 *Le Champi* was followed by *La Petite Fadette.*

La Mare au Diable, George Sand's first tale of exclusively peasant-life, is usually considered her masterpiece in this *genre.* It was suggested to her, she tells us, by Holbein's dismal engraving of death coming to the husbandman, an old, gaunt, ragged, overworked representative of his tribe—grim ending to a life of cheerless poverty and toil!

Here was the dark and painful side of the labourer's existence—a true picture, but not the whole truth. There was another and a bright side, which might just as allowably be represented in art as the dreary one, and which she had seen and studied. In Berry extreme poverty was the exception, and the agriculturist's life appeared as it ought to be, healthy, calm, and simple, its laboriousness compensated by the soothing influences of nature, and of strong home affections.

This little gem of a work is thoroughly well known. The ploughing-scene in the opening—ploughing as she had witnessed it sometimes in her own neighbourhood, fresh, rough ground broken up for tillage, the plough drawn by four yoke of young white oxen new to their work and but half-tamed, has a simplicity and grandeur of effect not easy to parallel in modern art. The *motif* of the tale is that you often go far to search for the good fortune that lies close to your door. Never was so homely an adage more freshly and prettily illus-

trated; yet how slight are the materials, how plain is the outline! Germain the well-to-do widowed labourer, in the course of a few miles' ride, a journey undertaken in order to present himself and his addresses to the rich widow his father desires him to woo, discovers the real life-companion he wants in the poor girl-neighbour whom he patronisingly escorts on her way to the farm where she is hired for service. It all slowly dawns upon him, in the most natural manner, as the least incidents of the journey call out her good qualities of head and heart—her helpfulness in misadventure, forgetfulness of self, unaffected fondness for children, instinctively recognised by Germain's little boy, who with his unconscious childish influence is one of the prettiest features in the book. Germain, by his journey's end, has his heart so well engaged in the right quarter that he is proof against the dangerous fascinations of the coquettish widow.

There is a breath of poetry over the picture, but no denaturalisation of the uncultured types. Germain is honest and warm-hearted, but not bright of understanding; little Marie is wise and affectionate, but as unsentimentally-minded as the veriest realist could desire. The native caution and mercenary habit of thought of the French agricultural class are indicated by many a humourous touch in the pastorals of George Sand.

Equally pleasing, though not aiming at the almost

antique simplicity of the *Mare au Diable*, is the story of *François le Champi*, the foundling, saved from the demoralisation to which lack of the softening influences of home and parental affection predestine such unhappy children, through the tenderness his forlorn condition inspires in a single heart—that of Madeline Blanchet, the childless wife, whose own wrongs, patiently borne, have quickened her commiseration for the wrongs of others. Her sympathy, little though it lies in her power to manifest it, he feels, and its incalculable worth to him, which is such that the gratitude of a whole life cannot do more than repay it.

Part of the narrative is here put into the mouth of a peasant, and told in peasant language, or something approaching to it. Over the propriety of this proceeding, adopted also in *Les Maîtres Sonneurs*, French critics are disagreed, though for the most part they regret it. It is not for a foreigner to decide between them. One would certainly regret the absence of some of the extremely original and expressive words and turns of speech current among the rural population, forms which such a method enabled her to introduce into the narrative as well as into the dialogue.

La Petite Fadette is not only worthy of its predecessors but by many will be preferred to either. There is something particularly attractive in the portraits of the twin brothers—partly estranged by character, wholly united by affection,—and in the figure of

Fanchon Fadet, an original in humble life, which has made this little work a general favourite wherever it is known.

These prose-idylls have been called "The Georgics of France." It is curious that in a country so largely agricultural, and where nature presents more variety of picturesque aspect than perhaps in any other in Europe, the poetic side of rural life should have been so sparingly represented in her imaginative literature. French poets of nature have mostly sought their inspiration out of their own land. "In France especially," observes Théophile Gautier, "all literary people live in town, that is in Paris the centre, know little of what is unconnected with it, and most of them cannot tell wheat from barley, potatoes from beet-root." It was a happy inspiration that prompted Madame Sand to fill in the blank, in a way all her own, and her task as we have seen was completed, revolutions notwithstanding. She owns to having then felt the attraction experienced in all time by those hard hit by public calamities, "to throw themselves back on pastoral dreams, all the more naïve and childlike for the brutality and darkness triumphant in the world of activity." Tired of "turning round and round in a false circle of argument, of accusing the governing minority, but only to be forced to acknowledge after all that they were put there by the choice of the majority," she wished to forget it all; and her poetic temperament

which unfitted her for success in politics assisted her in finding consolation in nature.

Moreover a district like Le Berry, singularly untouched by the corruptions of civilisation and preserving intact many old and interesting characteristics, was a field in which she might draw from reality many an attractive picture. She was as much rallied by town critics about her shepherdesses as though she had invented them. And yet she saw them every day, and they may be seen still by any wanderer in those lanes, and at every turn, Fanchons, Maries, Nanons, as she has described them, tending their flock of from five to a dozen sheep, or a few geese, a goat and a donkey, all day long between the tall hedgerows, or on the common, spinning the while, or possibly dreaming. A certain refinement of cast distinguishes the type. Eugène Delacroix, in a letter describing a village festival at Nohant, remarks that if positive beauty is rare among the natives, ugliness is a thing unknown. A gentle, passive cast of countenance prevails among the women: "They are all St. Annes," as the artist expresses it. The inevitable changes brought about by steam-communication, which have as yet only begun to efface the local habits and peculiarities, must shortly complete their work. George Sand's pastoral novels will then have additional value, as graphic studies of a state of things that has passed away.

It does not appear that the merit of these stories

was so quickly recognised as that of *Indiana* and *Valentine*. The author might abstract herself awhile from passing events and write idylls, but the public had probably not yet settled down into the proper state of mind for fully enjoying them. Moreover Madame Sand's antagonists in politics and social science, as though under the impression that she could not write except to advance some theory of which they disapproved, presupposed in these stories a set purpose of exalting the excellence of rustic as compared with polite life—of exaggerating the virtues of the poor, to throw into relief the vices of the rich. The romances themselves do not bear out such a supposition. In them the author chooses exactly the same virtues to exalt, the same vices to condemn, as in her novels of refined society. She shows us intolerance, selfishness, and tyranny of custom marring or endangering individual happiness among the working-classes, as with their superiors. There are Philistines in her thatched cottages, as well as in her marble halls. Germain, in *La Mare au Diable*, has some difficulty to discover for himself, as well as to convince his family and neighbours, that in espousing the penniless Marie he is not marrying beneath him in every sense. François le Champi is a pariah, an outcast, in the estimation of the rustic world. Fanchon Fadet, by her disregard of appearances and village etiquette, scandalises the conservative minds of farmers and millers very much as Aurore Dupin scandalised the

leaders of society at La Châtre. Most prominence is given to the more pleasing characters, but the existence of brutality and cupidity among the peasant classes is nowhere kept out of sight. Her long practical acquaintance with these classes indeed was fatal to illusions on the subject. The average son of the soil was as far removed as any other living creature from her ideal of humanity, and at the very time when she penned *La Petite Fadette* she was experiencing how far the ignorance, ill-will, and stupidity of her poorer neighbours could go.

Thus she writes from Nohant to Barbès at Vincennes, November 1848: "Since May, I have shut myself up in prison in my retreat, where, though without the hardships of yours, I have more to suffer than you from sadness and dejection. . . . and am less in safety." Threatened by the violence and hatred of the people, she had painfully realised that she and her party had their most obstinate enemies among those whom they wished and worked to save and defend.

Her profound discouragement finds expression in many of her letters from 1849 to 1852. The more sanguine hopes of Mazzini and other of her correspondents she desires, but no longer expects, to see fulfilled. She compares the moral state of France to the Russian retreat; the soldiers in the great army of progress seized with vertigo, and seeking death in fighting with each other.

To her son, who was in Paris at the time of the disturbances in May 1849, she writes:

Come back, I implore you. I have only you in the world, and your death would be mine. I can still be of some small use to the cause of truth, but if I were to lose you it would be all over with me. I have not got the stoicism of Barbès and Mazzini. It is true they are men, and they have no children. Besides in my opinion it is not in fight, not by civil war, that we shall win the cause of humanity in France. We have got universal suffrage. The worse for us if we do not know how to avail ourselves of it, for that alone can lastingly emancipate us, and the only thing that would give us the right to take up arms would be an attempt on their part to take away our right to vote.

During the two years preceding the *coup d'état* of December 1851, life at Nohant had resumed its wonted cheerfulness of aspect. Madame Sand was used to surround herself with young people and artistic people; but now, amid their light-heartedness, she had for a period to battle with an extreme inward sadness, confirmed by the fresh evidence brought by these years of the demoralisation in all ranks of opinion. "Your head is not very lucid when your heart is so deeply wounded," she had remarked already after the disasters of 1848, "and how can one help suffering mortally from the spectacle of civil war and the slaughter among the people?"

To that was now added a loss of faith in the virtues of her own party, as well as of the masses. It is no wonder if she fell out of love for awhile with the ideals of romance, with her own art of fiction, and the types of heroism that were her favourite creations. But if

the shadow of a morbid pessimism crept over her mind, she could view it now as a spiritual malady which she had yet the will and the strength to live down; as years before she had surmounted a similar phase of feeling induced by personal sorrow.

Already in 1847 she had begun to write her Memoirs, and reverting to them now, she found there work that suited her mood, as dealing with the past, more agreeable to contemplate just then than the present or the future.

However, in September 1850 we find her writing to Mazzini,—after dwelling on the present shortcomings of the people, and the mixture of pity and indignation with which they inspired her: "I turn back to fiction and produce, in art, popular types such as I see no longer; but as they ought to be and might be." She alludes to a play on which she was engaged, and continues: "The dramatic form, being new to me, has revived me a little of late; it is the only kind of work into which I have been able to throw myself for a year."

The events of December 1851 surprised her during a brief visit to Paris. Her hopes for her country had sunk so low, that she owns herself at the moment not to have regarded the *coup d'état* as likely to prove more disastrous to the cause of progress than any other of the violent ends which threatened the existing political situation. She left the capital in the midst of the

cannonade, and with her family around her at Nohant awaited the issue of the new dictatorship.

The wholesale arrests that followed immediately, and filled the country with stupefaction, made havoc on all sides of her. Among the victims were comrades of her childhood, numbers of her friends and acquaintance and their relatives—as well in Berry as in the capital—many arrested solely on suspicion of hostility to the President's views, yet none the less exposed to chances of death, or captivity, or exile.

The crisis drove Madame Sand once more to quit the privacy of her country life, but this time in the capacity of intercessor with the conqueror for his victims. She came up to Paris, and on January 20, 1852, addressed a letter to the President, imploring his clemency for the accused generally in an admirably eloquent appeal to his sentiments as well of justice as of generosity. The plea she so forcibly urged, that according to his own professions mere opinion was not to be prosecuted as a crime, whereas the so-called "preventive measures" had involved in one common ruin with his active opponents those who had been mere passive spectators of late events, was, of course, unanswerable. The future Emperor granted her two audiences within a week at the Elysée, in answer to her request, and he succeeded on the first occasion in convincing her that the acts of iniquity and intimidation perpetrated as by his authority were as completely

in defiance of his public intentions as of his private principles. As a personal favour to herself, he readily offered her the release of any of the political prisoners that she chose to name, and promised that a general amnesty should speedily follow. She left him, re-assured to some extent as to the fate in store for her country. The second interview she had solicited in order to plead the cause of one of her personal friends, condemned to transportation. The mission was a delicate one, for her client would engage himself to nothing for the future, and Madame Sand, in petitioning for his release, saw no better course open to her than, as expressed by herself, frankly to denounce him to the President as his "incorrigible personal enemy." Upon this the President granted her the prisoner's full pardon at once. Madame Sand was naturally touched by this ready response of the generous impulse to which she had trusted. To those who cast doubts on the sincerity of any good sentiment in such a quarter, she very properly replied that it was not for her to be the first to discredit the generosity she had so successfully appealed to.

But between her republican friends, loth to owe their deliverance to the tender mercies of Louis Napoleon, and her own desire to save their lives and liberties, and themselves and their families from ruin and despair, she found her office of mediator a most unthankful one. She persisted however in

unwearying applications for justice and mercy, addressed both to the dictator directly, and through his cousin, Prince Napoleon (Jerôme), between whom and herself there existed a cordial esteem. She clung as long as she could to her belief in the public virtue of the President, or Emperor as he already began to be called here and there. But the promised clemency limited itself to a number of particular cases for whom she had specially interceded.

The subsequent conditions of France precluded all free emission of socialist or republican opinions, but Madame Sand desired nothing better than to send in her political resignation; and it is impossible to share the regret of some of her fellow-republicans at finding her again devoting her best energies to her art of fiction, and in November 1853 writing to Mazzini such words of wisdom as these:—

You are surprised that I can work at literature. For my part, I thank God that he has let me preserve this faculty; for an honest and clear conscience like mine still finds, apart from all debate, a work of moralisation to pursue. What should I do if I relinquished my task, humble though it be? Conspire? It is not my vocation; I should make nothing of it. Pamphlets? I have neither the wit nor the wormwood required for that. Theories? We have made too many, and have fallen to disputing, which is the grave of all truth and all strength. I am, and always have been, artist before everything else. I know that mere politicians look on artists with great contempt, judging them by some of those mountebank-types which are a disgrace to art. But you, my friend, you well know that a real artist is as useful as the *priest* and the *warrior*, and that when he respects what is true and what is good, he is in the right path where the divine blessing will attend him. Art belongs to all countries and to all time, and its

special good is to live on when all else seems to be dying. That is why Providence delivers it from passions too personal or too general, and has given to its organisation patience and persistence, an enduring sensibility, and that contemplative sense upon which rests invincible faith.

Her novel, *Les Maîtres Sonneurs*, the first-fruits of the year 1853, is what most will consider a very good equivalent for party pamphlets and political diatribes.

When composing *La Mare au Diable*, in 1846, Madame Sand looked forward to writing a series of such peasant tales, to be collectively entitled *Les Veillées du Chanvreur*, the hemp-beaters being, as will be recollected, the Scheherazades of each village. Their number was never to be thus augmented, but the idea is recalled by the chapter-headings of *Les Maîtres Sonneurs*, in which Étienne Despardieu, or Tiennet, the rustic narrator, tells, in the successive *veillées* of a month, the romance of his youth. It is a work of a very different type to the rural tales that had preceded it, and should be regarded apart from them. It is longer, more complex in form and sentiment, more of an ideal composition. *Les Maîtres Sonneurs* is a delightful pastoral, woodland fantasy, standing by itself among romances much as stands a kindred work of imagination, "As You Like It," among plays, yet thoroughly characteristic of George Sand, the nature-lover, the seer into the mysteries of human character, and the imaginative artist. The agreeable preponderates in the

story, but it has its tragic features and its serious import. A picturesque and uncommon setting adds materially to its charm. Every thread tells in this delicate piece of fancy work, and the weaver's art is indescribable. But one may note the ingenuity with which four or five interesting yet perfectly natural types are brought into a group and contrasted; improbable incidents so handled as not to strike a discordant note, the characteristics of the past introduced without ever losing hold of the links, the points of identity between past and present. The scene is the hamlet of Nohant itself; the time is a century ago, when the country, half covered with forest, was wilder, the customs rougher, the local colouring stronger than even Madame Sand in her childhood had known them. The personages belong to the rural proprietor class. The leading characters are all somewhat out of the common, but such exist in equal proportion in all classes of society, and there is ample evidence besides George Sand's of notable examples among the French peasantry. The plot and its interest lie in the development of character and the fine tracing of the manner in which the different characters are influenced by circumstances and by each other. If the beauty of rustic maidens, and of rustic songs and dance music, as here described, seem to transcend probability, it must be remembered it is a peasant who speaks of these wonders, and as wonders they might appear to his

limited experience. As a musical novel, it has the ingenious distinction of being told from the point of view of the sturdy and honest, but unartistic and non-musical Tiennet; a typical Berrichon. Madame Sand was of opinion that during the long occupation of Berry by the English the two races had blended extensively, and she would thus account for some of the heavier, more inexpansive qualities of our nation having become characteristic of this French province.

More than one English reader of *Les Maîtres Sonneurs* may have been struck by the picture there presented of peasant-folk in a state of peace and comfort, such as we do not suppose to have been common in France before the Revolution. Madame Sand has elsewhere explained how, as a fact, Nohant, and other estates in the region round about, had enjoyed some immunity from the worst abuses of the *ancien régime*. Several of these properties, as it happened, had fallen to women or minors—widows, elderly maiden ladies, who, and their agents, spared the holders and cultivators of the soil the exactions which, by right or by might, its lords were used to levy. "So the peasants," she writes, "were accustomed not to put themselves to any inconvenience; and when came the Revolution they were already so well relieved virtually from feudal bonds that they took revenge on nobody." A new *seigneur* of Nohant, coming to take possession, and thinking to levy his utmost dues, in cash and in kind,

found his rustic tenants turn a deaf ear to his summons. Ere he could insist the storm burst, but it brought no convulsion, and merely confirmed an independence already existing.

Les Maîtres Sonneurs, whilst illustrating some of the most striking merits of George Sand, is free from the defects often laid to her charge; and although of all her pastorals it must suffer the most when rendered in any language but the original, it is much to be regretted that some good translation of this work should not put it within the reach of all English readers.

CHAPTER X.

PLAYS AND LATER NOVELS.

There are few eminent novelists that have not tried their hands at writing for the stage; and Madame Sand had additional inducements to do so, beyond those of ambition satiated with literary success, and tempted by the charm of making fresh conquest of the public in a more direct and personal fashion.

From early childhood she had shown a strong liking for the theatre. The rare performances given by travelling acting-companies at La Châtre had been her greatest delight when a girl. At the convent-school she had arranged Molière from memory for representation by herself and her schoolfellows, careful so to modify the piece as to avoid all possibility of shocking the nuns. Thus the Sisters applauded *Le Malade Imaginaire* without any suspicion that the author was one whose works, for them, were placed

under a ban, and whose very name they held in devout abhorrence. She inherited from her father a taste for acting, which she transmitted to her children. We have seen her, during her literary novitiate in Paris, a studious observer at all theatres, from the classic boards of the Français, down to the lowliest of popular stages, the Funambules, where reigned at that time a real artist in pantomime, Débureau. His Pierrot, a sort of modified Pulchinello, was renowned, and attracted more fastidious critics to his audience than the Paris artisans whose idol he was. Since then Madame Sand had numbered among her personal friends such leading dramatic celebrities as Madame Dorval, Bocage, and Pauline Garcia. "I like actors," she says playfully, "which has scandalised some austere people. I have also been found fault with for liking the peasantry. Among these I have passed my life, and as I found them so have I described them. As these, in the light of the sun, give us our daily bread for our bodies, so those, by gaslight, give us our daily bread of fiction, so needful to the wearied spirit, troubled by realities." Peasants and players seem to be the types of humanity farthest removed from each other, and it is worthy of remark that George Sand was equally successful in her presentation of both.

Her preference for originality and spontaneity before all other qualities in a dramatic artist, was characteristic of herself, though not of her nation. Thus it was that

Madame Dorval, the heroine of *Antony* and *Marion Delorme,* won her unbounded admiration. Even in Racine she clearly preferred her to Mdlle. Mars, as being a less studied actress, and one who abandoned herself more to the inspiration of the moment. The effect produced, as described by Madame Sand, will be understood by all keenly alive, like herself, to the enjoyment of dramatic art. "She" (Madame Dorval) "seemed to me to be myself, more expansive, and to express in action and emotion all that I seek to express in writing." And compared with such an art, in which conception and expression are simultaneous, her own art of words and phrases would at such moments appear to her as but a pale reflection.

Bocage, the great character actor of his time, was another who likewise appealed particularly to her sympathies, as the personation, on the boards, of the protest of the romantic school against the slavery of convention and tradition. Her acquaintance with him dated from the first representation of Hugo's *Lucrèce Borgia,* February 1833, when Bocage and the author of *Indiana,* then strangers to each other, chanced to sit side by side. In their joint enthusiasm over the play they made the beginning of a thirty years' friendship, terminated only by Bocage's death in 1862. "It was difficult not to quarrel with him," she says of this popular favourite, "he was susceptible and violent; it was impossible not to be reconciled with him quickly. He was faithful

and magnanimous. He forgave you admirably for wrongs you had never done him, and it was as good and real as though the pardon had been actual and well-founded, so strong was his imagination, so complete his good faith."

The assistance of Madame Dorval, added to the strength of the Comédie Française company, did not however save from failure Madame Sand's first drama, *Cosima*, produced, as will be remembered, in 1840. She allowed nearly a decade to elapse before again seriously competing for theatrical honours, by a second effort in a different style, and more satisfactory in its results.

This, a dramatic adaptation by herself of her novel, *François le Champi*, was produced at the Odéon in the winter of 1849. Generally speaking, to make a good play out of a good novel, the playwright must begin by murdering the novel; and here, as in all George Sand's dramatic versions of her romances, we seem to miss the best part of the original. However, the curious simplicity of the piece, the rustic scenes and personages, here faithfully copied from reality, unlike the conventional village and villager of opera comique, and the pleasing sentiment that runs through the tale, were found refreshing by audiences upon whom the sensational incidents and harrowing emotions of their modern drama were already beginning to pall. The result was a little stage triumph for Madame Sand.

It helped to draw to her pastoral tales the attention they deserved, but had not instantly won in all quarters. Théophile Gautier writes playfully of this piece: "The success of *François le Champi* has given all our vaudeville writers an appetite for rusticity. Only let this go on a little, and we shall be inundated by what has humorously been called the 'ruro-drama.' Morvan hats and Berrichon head-dresses will invade the scenes, and no language be spoken but in dialect."

Madame Sand was naturally encouraged to repeat the experiment. This was done in *Claudie* (1851) and *Le Pressoir* (1853), ruro-dramas both, and most favourably received. The first-named has a simple and pathetic story, and, as usual with Madame Sand's plays, it was strengthened at its first production by the support of some of the best acting talent in Paris—Fechter, then a rising *jeune premier* and the veteran Bocage ably representing, respectively, youth and age. Old Berrichon airs were introduced with effect, as also such picturesque rustic festival customs as the ancient harvest-home ceremony, in which the last sheaf is brought on in a waggon, gaily decked out with poppies, cornflowers, and ribbons, and receives a libation of wine poured by the hand of the oldest or the youngest person present.

"But what the theatre can never reproduce," laments Madame Sand, "is the majesty of the frame—the mountain of sheaves solemnly approaching, drawn by

three pair of enormous oxen, the whole adorned with flowers, with fruit, and with fine little children perched upon the top of the last sheaves."

Henceforward a good deal of her time and interest continued to be absorbed by these dramatic compositions. But though mostly eliciting during her lifetime a gratifying amount of public favour and applause, the best of them cannot for an instant be placed in the same high rank as her novels. For with all her wide grasp of the value of dramatic art and her exact appreciation of the strength and the weakness of the acting world, her plays remain, to great expectations, uniformly disappointing. Her speciality in fiction lies in her favourite art of analysing and putting before us, with extreme clearness, the subtlest ramifications, the most delicate intricacies of feeling and thought. A stage audience has its eyes and ears too busy to give its full attention to the finer complications of sentiment and motive; or, at least, in order to keep its interest alive and its understanding clear, an accentuation of outline is needed, which she neglects even to seek.

Her assertion, that the niceties of emotion are sufficient to found a good play upon, no one now will dream of disputing. But for this an art of execution is needed of which she had not the instinct. The action is insufficient, or rather the sense of action is not conveyed. The slightness of plot—a mere thread in most

instances—requires that the thread shall at least be never allowed to drop. But she cuts or slackens it perpetually, long arguments and digressions intervening, and the dialogue, whose monotony is unrelieved by wit, nowhere compensates for the limited interest of the action. Awkward treatment is but half felt when subject and situations are dramatically strong; but plays with so airy and impalpable a basis as these need to be sustained by the utmost perfection of construction, concision, and polish of dialogue.

Her novel *Mauprat* has many dramatic points, and she received a score of applications for leave to adapt it to the stage. She preferred to prepare the version herself, and it was played in the winter of 1853–4, with moderate success. But it suffers fatally from comparison with its original. An extreme instance is *Flaminio* (1854), a protracted drama, drawn by Madame Sand from her novelette *Teverino*. This is a fantasy-piece whose audacity is redeemed, as are certain other blemishes, by the poetic suggestiveness of the figure of Madeleine the bird-charmer; whilst the picturesque sketch of Teverino, the idealized Italian bohemian, too indolent to turn his high natural gifts to any account, has proved invaluable to the race of novelists, who are not yet tired of reproducing it in large. The work is one addressed mainly to the imagination.

In the play we come down from the clouds—the poetry is gone, taste is shocked, fancy uncharmed,

the improbabilities become grotesque, and the whole is distorted and tedious. Madame Sand's personages are never weary of analysing their sentiments. Her flowing style, so pleasant to read, carries us swiftly and easily through her dissertations in print, before we have time to tire of them. On the stage such colloquies soon appear lengthy and unnatural. The climax of absurdity is reached in *Flaminio,* where we find the adventurer expatiating to the man of the world on "the divinity of his essence."

There is scarcely a department of theatrical literature in which Madame Sand does not appear as an aspirant. She was a worshipper of Shakespeare, acknowledging him as the king of dramatic writers. For her attempt to adapt "As You Like It" to suit the tastes of a Parisian audience, she disarms criticism by a preface in the form of a letter to M. Régnier, of the Comédie Française, prefixed to the printed play. Here she says plainly that to resolve to alter Shakspeare is to resolve to murder, and that she aims at nothing more than at giving the French public some idea of the original. In "As You Like It," the license of fancy taken is too wide for the piece to be safely represented to her countrymen, since it must jar terribly on "that French reason which," remarks Madame Sand, "we are so vain of, and which deprives us of so many originalities quite as precious as itself." The fantastic, which had so much attraction for her

(possibly a result of her part German origin), is a growth that has hard work to flourish on French soil. The reader will remember the fate of Weber's *Freischütz,* outrageously hissed when first produced at Paris in its original form. Nine days later it was reproduced, having been taken to pieces and put together again by M. Castil-Blaze, and thus as *Robin des Bois* it ran for 357 nights. The reckless imagination that distinguishes the Shakespearian comedy and does not shrink before the introduction of a lion and a serpent into the forest of Arden, and the miraculous and instantaneous conversion of the wretch Oliver into a worthy suitor for Celia, needed to be toned down for acceptance by the Parisians. But Madame Sand was less fortunate than M. Castil-Blaze. Her version, produced at the Théâtre Français in 1856, failed to please, although supported by such actors as Delaunay, Arnold-Plessy, and Favart. Macready, who had made Madame Sand's acquaintance in 1845 when he was giving Shakespearian performances in Paris, and whom she greatly admired, dedicating to him her little theatrical romance *Le Château des Désertes,* was present at this representation and records it as a failure. But of her works for the stage, which number over a score, few like her *Comme il vous plaira* missed making some mark at the time, the prestige of her name and the exceptionally favourable circumstances under which they were produced securing more than

justice for their intrinsic merit. It was natural that she should over-estimate their value and continue to add to their number. These pieces would be carefully rehearsed on the little stage in the house at Nohant, often with the aid of leading professional actors; and there, at least, the success was unqualified.

Her ingenious novel *Les Beaux Messieurs de Bois Doré*, dramatised with the aid of Paul Meurice and acted in 1862, was a triumph for Madame Sand and her friend Bocage. The form and spirit of this novel seem inspired by Sir Walter Scott, and though far from perfect, it is a striking instance of the versatility of her imaginative powers. The leading character of the septuagenarian Marquis, with his many amiable virtues, and his one amiable weakness, a longing to preserve intact his youthfulness of appearance as he has really preserved his youthfulness of heart, is both natural and original, comic and half pathetic withal. The part in the play seemed made for Bocage, and his heart was set upon undertaking it. But his health was failing at the time, and the manager hesitated about giving him the rôle. "Take care, my friend," wrote Bocage to Madame Sand, "perhaps I shall die if I play the part; but if I play it not, I shall die of that, to a certainty." She insisted, and play it he did, to perfection, she tells us. "He did not act the Marquis de Bois Doré, he was the personage himself, as the author had dreamt him." It was to be his last achievement,

and he knew it. "It is my end," he said to her one night, "but I shall die like a soldier on the field of honour." And so he did, continuing to play the rôle up till a few days before his death.

More lasting success has attended Madame Sand in two of the lightest of society comedies, *Le Mariage de Victorine* and *Le Marquis de Villemer*, which seem likely to take a permanent place in the *répertoire* of the French stage. The first, a continuation that had suggested itself to her of Sedaine's century-old comedy, *Le Philosophe sans le savoir*, escapes the ill fate that seems to attend sequels in general. It is of the slightest materials, but holds together, and is gracefully conceived and executed. First produced at the Gymnase in 1851, it was revived during the last year of Madame Sand's life in a manner very gratifying to her, being brought out with great applause at the Comédie Française, preceded on each occasion by Sedaine's play, and the same artists appearing in both.

The excellent dramatic version of her popular novel *Le Marquis de Villemer*, first acted in 1864, is free from the defects that weaken most of her stage compositions. It is said that in preparing it she accepted some hints from Alexandre Dumas the younger. Whatever the cause, the result is a play where characters, composition, and dialogue leave little to be desired.

L'Autre, her latest notable stage success, brings us

down to 1870, when it was acted at the Gymnase, Madame Sarah Bernhardt impersonating the heroine. This not very agreeable play is derived, with material alterations, from Madame Sand's agreeable novel *La Confession d'une jeune Fille*, published in 1864.

If, however, her works for the stage, which fill four volumes, added but little, in proportion to their quantity, to her permanent fame, her dramatic studies added fresh interest and variety to her experience, which brought forth excellent fruit in her novels. Actors, their art, and way of life have fared notoriously badly in fiction. Such pictures have almost invariably fallen into the extreme of unreality or that of caricature, whether for want of information or want of sympathy in those who have drawn them.

The subject, always attractive for Madame Sand, is one in which she is always happy. Already in the first year of her literary career her keen appreciation of the art and its higher influences had prompted her clever novelette *La Marquise*. Here she illustrates the power of the stage as a means of expression—of the truly inspired actor, though his greatness be but momentary, and his heroism a semblance, to strike a like chord in the heart of the spectator—and, in a corrupt and artificial age, to keep alive some latent faith in the ideal. Since then the stage and players had figured repeatedly in her works. Sometimes she portrays a perfected type, such as Consuelo, or Impéria in *Pierre qui roule*,

but always side by side with more earthly and faulty representatives such as Corilla and Anzoleto, or Julia and Albany, in *Narcisse,* incarnations of the vanity and instability that are the chief dangers of the profession, drawn with unsparing realism. In *Le Château des Désertes* we find further many admirable theories and suggestive ideas on the subject of the regeneration of the theatre. But it fared with her theatrical as with her political philosophy; she failed in its application, not because her theories were false, but for want of practical aptitude for the craft whose principles she understood so well.

It is impossible here to do more than cast a rapid glance over the literary work accomplished by George Sand during the first decade of the empire. It includes more than a dozen novels, of unequal merit, but of merit for the most part very high. The *Histoire de ma Vie* was published in 1855. It is a study of chosen passages out of her life, rather than a connected autobiography. One out of the four volumes is devoted to the story of her father's life before her birth; two more to the story of her childhood and girlhood. The fourth rather indicates than fully narrates the facts of her existence from the time of her marriage till the Revolution of 1848. It offers to her admirers invaluable glimpses into her life and mind, and is a highly interesting and characteristic composition, if a most irregular chronicle. It has given rise to two most incompatible-sounding criticisms

Some have been chiefly struck by its amazing unreserve, and denounced the over-frankness of the author in revealing herself to the public. Others complain that she keeps on a mask throughout, and never allows us to see into the recesses of her mind. Her passion for the analysis of sentiment has doubtless led her here, as in her romances, to give very free expression to truths usually better left unspoken. But her silence on many points about which her readers, whether from mere curiosity or some more honourable motive, would gladly have been informed, was then inevitable. It could not have been broken without wounding the susceptibilities of living persons, which she did right in respecting, at the cost of disappointment to an inquisitive public.

In January 1855, a terrible domestic sorrow befell her in the loss of her six years old grandchild, Jeanne Clésinger, to whom she was devoted. It affected her profoundly. "Is there a more mortal grief," she exclaims, "than to outlive, yourself, those who should have bloomed upon your grave?" The blow told upon her mentally and physically; she could not rally from its effects, till persuaded to seek a restorative in change of air and scene, which happily did their work.

"I was ill," she says, when writing of these events to a lady-correspondent, later in the same year, "my son took me away to Italy . . . I have seen Rome, revisited Florence, Genoa, Frascati, Spezia, Marseilles. I have walked a great deal, been out in the sun, the rain, the

wind, for whole days out of doors. This, for me, is a certain remedy, and I have come back cured."

Those who care to follow the mind of George Sand on this Italian journey may safely infer from *La Daniella*, a novel written after this tour, and the scene of which is laid in Rome and the Campagna, that the author's strongest impression of the Eternal City was one of disillusion. Her hero, a Berrichon artist on his travels, confesses to a feeling of uneasiness and regret rather than of surprise and admiration. The ancient ruins, stupendous in themselves, seemed to her spoilt for effect by their situation in the centre of a modern town. "Of the Rome of the past not enough exists to overwhelm me with its majesty; of the Rome of the present not enough to make me forget the first, and much too much to allow me to see her."

But the Baths of Caracalla, where the picture is not set in a frame of hideous houses, awakened her native enthusiasm. "A grandiose ruin," she exclaims, "of colossal proportions; it is shut away, isolated, silent and respected. There you feel the terrific power of the Cæsars, and the opulence of a nation intoxicated with its royalty over the world."

So in the Appian Way, the road of tombs, the fascination of desolation—a desolation there unbroken and undisfigured by modern buildings or otherwise—she felt to the full. But whatever came under her

notice she looked on with the eye of the poet and artist, not of the archæologist, and approved or disapproved or passed over it accordingly.

The beauties of nature, at Tivoli and Frascati, appealed much more surely to her sympathies. But of certain sites in the Campagna much vaunted by tourists and hand-books she remarks pertinently: "If you were to pass this village" (Marino) "on the railway within a hundred miles of Paris, you would not pay it the slightest attention." Such places had their individuality, but she upheld that there is not a corner in the universe, "however common-place it may appear, but has a character of its own, unique in this world, for anyone who is disposed to feel or comprehend it." In one of her village tales, a sagacious peasant professes his profound contempt for the man who cannot like the place he belongs to.

Neither the grottoes and cascades of Tivoli, the cypress and ilex gardens of Frascati and Albano, nor the ruins of Tusculum, were ever so pleasant to her eyes as the poplar-fringed banks of the Indre, the cornlands and hedgerows of Berry, and the rocky borders of the Creuse at Crozant and Argenton. She had not ceased making fresh picturesque discoveries in her own neighbourhood. Of these she records an instance in her pleasant *Promenades autour d'un village*, a lively sketch of a few days' walking-tour on the banks of the Creuse, undertaken by herself and some naturalist

friends in June 1857. In studying the interesting and secluded village of Gargilesse, with its tenth-century church and crypt with ancient frescoes, its simple and independent-minded population, in following the course of a river whose natural wild beauties, equal to those of the Wye, are as yet undisfigured here by railroad or the hand of man, lingering on its banks full of summer flowers and butterflies, exploring the castles of Châteaubrun and La Prugne au Pot, George Sand is happier, more herself, more communicative than in Rome, "the museum of the universe."

The years 1858 to 1861 show her to us in the fullest conservation of her powers and in the heyday of activity. The group of novels belonging to this period, the climax of what may be called her second career, is sufficiently remarkable for a novelist who was almost a sexagenarian, including *Elle et Lui, L'Homme de Neige, La Ville Noire, Constance Verrier, Le Marquis de Villemer,* and *Valvèdre*. *Elle et Lui,* in which George Sand at last broke silence in her own defence on the subject of her rupture with Alfred de Musset, first appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* 1859. Though many of the details are fictitious, the author here told the history of her relations with the deceased poet much too powerfully for her intention to be mistaken or to escape severe blame. That a magnanimous silence would have been the nobler course on her part towards the child of genius whose good genius she had so signally failed to

be, need not be disputed. It must be remembered, however, that De Musset on his side had not refrained during his lifetime from denouncing in eloquent verse the friend he had quarrelled with, and satirizing her in pungent prose. Making every possible allowance for poetical figures of speech, he had said enough to provoke her to retaliate. It is impossible to suppose that there was not another side to such a question. But Madame Sand could not defend herself without accusing her lost lover. She often proved herself a generous adversary—too generous, indeed, for her own advantage—and in this instance it was clearly not for her own sake that she deferred her apology.

It is even conceivable that the poet, when in a just frame of mind, and not seeking inspiration for his *Nuit de Mai*, or *Histoire d'un Merle blanc*, would not have seen in *Elle et Lui* a falsification of the spirit of their history. The theorising of the outside world in such matters is of little worth; but the novel bears, conspicuously among Madame Sand's productions, the stamp of a study from real life, true in its leading features. And the conduct of the heroine, Therèse, though accounted for and eloquently defended, is by no means, as related, ideally blameless. After an attachment so strong as to induce a seriously-minded person, such as she is represented, to throw aside for it all other considerations, the hastiness with which, on discovering her mistake, she entertains the idea of bestowing

her hand, if not her heart, on another, is an exhibition of feminine inconsequence which no amount of previous misconduct on the part of her lover, Laurent, can justify. Further Therèse is self-deceived in supposing her passion to have died out with her esteem. She breaks with the culprit, and engages her word to a worthier man. But enough remains over of the past to prevent her from keeping the promise she ought never to have made. When she sacrifices her unselfish friend to return to the lover who has made her miserable, she is sincere, but not heroic. She is too weak to shake off the influence of the fatal infatuation and shut out Laurent from her life, nor yet can she accept her heart's choice for better or worse, even when experience has left her little to learn with regard to Laurent. Clearly both friend and lover, out of a novel, would feel wronged. Therèse's excuse lies in the extremely trying character of her companion, whose vagaries may be supposed to have driven her beside herself at times, just as her airs of superiority and mute reproach may have driven him not a little mad. Those who wish to know in what spirit Madame Sand met the attacks upon her provoked by this book, will find her reply in a very few words at the conclusion of her preface to *Jean de la Roche*, published the same year.

Most readers of *Elle et Lui* have been so preoccupied with the question of the rights and wrongs of the originals in their behaviour to each other, so inclined

to judge of the book according to its supposed accuracy or inaccuracy as a matter of history, that its force, as a study of the attraction that so often leads two exceptional but hopeless irreconcilable spirits to seek in each other a refuge from the isolation in which their superiority places them, has been somewhat overlooked. Laurent, whether a true portrait or not, is only too true to nature; excessive in his admirable powers and in his despicable weakness. Therèse is an equally faithful picture of a woman not quite up to the level of her own principles, which are so high that any lapse from them on her part brings down more disasters on herself and on others than the misdemeanours of avowedly unscrupulous persons.

Within a few months of *Elle et Lui* had appeared *L'Homme de Neige*, a work of a totally different but equally characteristic cast. The author's imagination had still all its old zest and activity, and readers for whom fancy has any charm will find this Scandinavian romance thoroughly enjoyable. The subject of the Marionnette theatre, here introduced with such brilliant and ingenious effect, she had studied both historically and practically. She and her son found it so fascinating that, years before this time, a miniature stage had been constructed by the latter at Nohant, over which he presided, and which they and their friends found an endless source of amusement. Madame Sand wrote little dramas expressly for such representations, and would sit up all

night making dresses for the puppets. In an agreeable little article she has devoted to the subject, she describes how from the crudest beginnings they succeeded in elaborating their art to a high pitch; the *répertoire* of their lilliputian theatre including more than twenty plays, their "company" over a hundred marionettes.

To the next year, 1860, belong the pleasant tale of artisan life, *La Ville Noire,* and the well-known and popular *Marquis de Villemer,* notable as a decided success in a *genre* seldom adopted by her, that of the purely society novel.

Already Madame Sand had outlived the period of which she was so brilliant a representative. After the Romantic movement had spent its force, a reaction had set in that was influencing the younger school of writers, and that has continued to give the direction to successful talent until the present day. Of the so-called "realism," Madame Sand said that it was nothing new. She saw there merely another form of the same revolt of nature against affectation and convention which had prompted the Romantic movement, whose disciples had now become guilty of affectation in their turn. *Madame Bovary* she pronounced with truth to be but concentrated Balzac. She was ready to perceive and do justice to the great ability of the author, as to original genius in any school; thus of Tourguénief she speaks with enthusiasm: "Realist to see all, poet

to beautify all, great heart to pity and understand all." But she deplored the increasing tendency among artists to give the preference among realities to the ugliest and the most painful. Her personal leanings avowedly were towards the other extreme; but she was too large-minded not to recognise that truth in one form or another must always be the prime object of the artist's search. The manner of its presentation will vary with the age.

Let the realists, if they like, go on proclaiming that all is prose, and the idealists that all is poesy. The last will have their rainy days, the first their days of sunshine. In all arts the victory remains with a privileged few, who go their own ways; and the discussions of the "schools" will pass away like old fashions.

On the generation of writers that George Sand saw growing up, any opinion pronounced must be premature. But with regard to herself, it should now be possible to regard her work in a true perspective. As with Byron, Dickens, and other popular celebrities, a phase of infinite enthusiasm for her writings wa duly succeeded by a phase of determined depreciation. The public opinion that survives when blind friendship and blind enmity have done their worst is likely to be the judgment of posterity.

CHAPTER XI.

ARTIST AND MORALIST.

On what, in the future, will the fame of George Sand mainly rest? According to some critics, on her gifts of fertile invention and fluent narration alone, which make her novels attractive in spite of the chimerical theories, social, political and religious, everywhere interwoven. According to other judges again, her fictions transcend and are likely to outlive other fictions by virtue of certain eternal philosophic verities which they persistently set forth, and which give them a serious interest the changes in novel-fashions cannot affect.

The conclusion seems inevitable that whilst the artistic strength of George Sand's writings is sufficient to command readers among those most out of harmony with her views, to minds in sympathy with her own these romances, because they express and enforce with

earnestness, sincerity, and fire, the sentiments of a poetic soul, a generous heart, and an immense intelligence, on subjects of consequence to humanity, have a higher value than can attach to skilful development of plot and intrigue, mere display of literary cleverness, or of the storings of minute observation.

Her opinions themselves have been widely misapprehended, perhaps because her personality—or rather that imaginary personage, the George Sand of the myths—has caused a confusion in people's minds between her ideal standard and her individual success in keeping up to it. We would not ignore the importance of personal example in one so famous as herself. We may pass by eccentricities not inviting to imitation; for if any of her sex ever thought to raise themselves any nearer to the level of George Sand by smoking or wearing men's clothes, such puerility does not call for notice. Still the influence she strenuously exerted for good as a writer for the public would have worked more clearly had she never seemed to swerve from the high principles she expressed, or been led away by the disturbing forces of a nature calm only on the surface. Nothing is more baffling than the incomplete revelations of a very complex order of mind, with its many-sided sympathies and its apparent contradictions. The self-justification she puts forward for her errors is sometimes sophistical, but not for that insincere. She is not trying to make us her dupes, she is the dupe herself of her dangerous

eloquence. But her moral worth so infinitely outweighed the alloy as to leave but little call, or even warrant, for dwelling on the latter. "If I come back to you," said her old literary patron Delatouche into whose disfavour she had fallen awhile, when he came years after to ask for the restitution of the friendship he had slighted, "it is that I cannot help myself, and your qualities surpass your defects."

To pass from herself to her books, no one has made more frank, clear, and unchanging confession of their heart's faith and their head's principles. Her creed was that which has been, and ever will be in some guise, the creed of minds of a certain order. She did not invent it. Poets, moralists, theologians have proclaimed it before her and after her. She found for it a fresh mode of expression, one answering to the needs of the age to which she belonged.

It is in the union of rare artistic genius with an almost as rare and remarkable power of enthusiasm for moral and spiritual truth that lies her distinguishing strength. Most of her novels—all her best novels—share this characteristic of seeming to be prompted by the double and equal inspiration of an artistic and a moral purpose. Wherever one of these preponderates greatly, or is wanting altogether, the novel falls below her usual standard.

For in several qualities reckoned important her work is open to criticism. "Plan, or the want of it," she

acknowledges, with a sort of complacency, "has always been my weak point." Thus whilst in many of her compositions, especially the shorter novels, the construction leaves little to be desired, *Consuelo* is only one among many instances in which all ordinary rules of symmetry and proportion are set at nought. Sometimes the leading idea assumed naturally and easily a perfect form; if simple, as in *André* and her pastorals, it usually did so; but if complex, she troubled herself little over the task of symmetrical arrangement. M. Maxime Du Camp reports that she said to him, "When I begin a novel I have no plan, it arranges itself whilst I write, and becomes what it may." This fault shocks less in England, where genius is apt to rebel against the restrictions of form and such irregularity has been consecrated, so to speak, by the masterpieces of the greatest among our imaginative writers. And even the more precise criticism of her countrymen has owned that this carelessness works by no means entirely to her disadvantage. In fictions more faultless as literary compositions the reader, whilst struck with admiration for the art with which the whole is put together, is apt to lose something of the illusion—the impression of nature and conviction. The faults of no writer can be more truly defined as the *défauts de ses qualités* than those of George Sand. Shorn of her spontaneity she would indeed be shorn of her strength. We are carried along by the pleasant,

easy stream of her musical eloquence, as by an orator who knows so well how to draw our attention that we forget to find him too long. Her stories may be read rapidly, but to be enjoyed should be read through. Dipped into and their parts taken without reference to the whole, they can afford comparatively but little pleasure.

In translation no novelist loses more than George Sand,—who has so much to lose! The qualities sacrificed, though almost intangible, are essential to the force of her charm. The cement is taken away and the fabric coheres imperfectly; and whilst the beauties of her manner are blurred its blemishes appear increased; the lengthiness, over-emphasis of expression, questionable taste of certain passages, become more marked. Although nevertheless many of her tales remain pleasant reading, they suffer as much as translated poetry, and only a very inadequate impression of her art as a novelist can be arrived at from any rendering of it in a foreign tongue.

Her dialogue has neither brilliancy nor variety. Her characters characterise themselves by the sentiments they express; their manner of expression is somewhat uniform, it is the manner of George Sand; and although pleasant humour and good-natured fun abound in her pages, these owe none of their attractions to witty sayings, being curiously bare of a *bon mot* or an epigram.

But we find there the rarer merits of a poetic imagination, a vast comprehension of nature, admirable insight into human character and power of clear analysis; a whole science of sentiment, an art of narrative, and a charm of narrative style that soothes the nerves like music.

She has given us a long gallery of portraits of extraordinary variety. It is true that her creations for the most part affect us rather as masterly portraits than as living, walking men and women. This is probably owing to the above-noted sameness of style of dialogue, and the absence generally of the dramatic quality in her novels. On the other hand they are extremely picturesque, in the highest sense, abounding in scenes and figures which, without inviting to the direct illustration they are too vivid to need, are full of suggestions to the artist. The description in *Teverino* of Madeleine the bird-charmer, kneeling at prayer in the rude mountain chapel, or outside on the rocks, exercising her natural magic over her feathered friends; in *Jeanne* of the shepherd-girl discovered asleep on the Druidical stones; the noon-day rest of the rustic fishing-party in *Valentine*—Benedict seated on the felled ash-tree that bridges the stream, Athenaïs gathering field flowers on the banks, Louise flinging leaves into the current, Valentine reclining dreamily among the tall river-reeds—are a few examples taken at random, which it would be easy to multiply *ad infinitum*.

Any classification of her works in order of time that professes to show a progressive change of style, a period of super-excellence or of distinct decadence, seems to us somewhat fanciful. From *Indiana* and its immediate successors, denounced by so many as fraught with peril to the morals of her nation, down to *Nanon* (1872), which might certainly carry off the prize of virtue in a competition in any country, George Sand can never be said to have entirely abandoned one "manner" for another, or for any length of time to have risen above or sunk below a certain level of excellence. *André*, extolled by her latest critics as "a delicious eclogue of the fields," was contemporary with the bombastic false Byronism of *Jacques*; the simple narrative of *La Mare au Diable* with the passion-introspection of *Lucrezia Floriani*. The ever-popular *Consuelo* immediately succeeded the feeble *Compagnon du Tour de France*. *La Marquise*, written in the first year of her literary life, shows a power of projection out of herself, and of delicate analysis, hardly to be surpassed; but *Francia*, of forty years later date, is an equally perfect study. From the time of *Indiana* onwards she continued to produce at the rate of about two novels a year; and at intervals, rare intervals, the product was a failure. But we shall find her when approaching seventy still writing on, without a trace of the weakness of old age.

The charge of "unreality" so commonly brought against her novels it may be well briefly to examine.

Such little fantasy pieces in Hoffmann's manner as *Le Château des Désertes, Teverino,* and others, making no pretence to be exact studies of nature cannot fairly be censured on this head. Like fairy tales they have a place of their own in art. One of the prettiest of these is *Les Dames Vertes,* in which the fable seems to lead us over the borders of the supernatural; but the secret of the mystification, well kept till the last, is itself so pleasing and original that the reader has no disappointing sense as of having had a hoax played upon his imagination.

In character-drawing no one can, on occasion, be a more uncompromising realist than George Sand. André, Horace, Laurent in *Elle et Lui,* Pauline, Corilla, Alida in *Valvèdre,* might be cited as examples. But her theory was unquestionably not the theory which guides the modern school of novel writers. She wrote, she states explicitly, for those "who desire to find in a novel a sort of ideal of life." She made this her aim, but without depreciation of the widely different aims of other authors. "You paint mankind as they are," she said to Balzac; "I, as they ought to be, or might become. You write the comedy of humanity. I should like to write the eclogue, the poem, the romance of humanity." She has been taxed with flattering nature and human nature because her love of beauty —defined by her as the highest expression of truth— dictated her choice of subjects. An artist who paints

roses paints from reality as entirely as he who paints mud. Her principle was to choose among realities those which seemed best worth painting.

The amount of idealisation in her peasant sketches was naturally over-estimated by those who, never having studied the class, could not conceive of a peasant except conventionally, as a drunken boor. The very just portrait of Cecilia Boccaferri, the conscientious but obscure artiste in *Le Château des Désertes*, might seem over-flattered to such as imagine that all opera-singers must be persons of riotous living. The types she prefers to present, if exceptional, are not impossible or non-existent. An absolutely faultless heroine, such as Consuelo, she seldom attempts to bring before us, an ideal hero, never.

Further, even where the idealism is greatest the essence is true. Her most fanciful conceptions, most improbable combinations, seem more natural than do every-day scenes and characters treated by inferior artists. This is only partly due to the inimitable little touches of nature that renew the impression of reality at every page. Her imagination modified her material, but only in order the more vividly to illustrate truths positive and everlasting. So did Shakespeare when he drew Prospero and Miranda, Caliban and Ariel. Art, as regarded by George Sand, is a search for ideal truth rather than a study of positive reality. This principle determined the spirit of her romances. She

was the highest in her *genre*; let the world decide which *genre* is the highest.

When, after the publication of *Indiana, Valentine, Lélia,* and *Jacques,* the moral tendency of her works was so sharply attacked, it was contended on her behalf by some friendly critics that art and social morality have no necessary connection, a line of defence she would have been the last to take up for herself. In the present day her judges complain rather of her incessant moralising, and on the whole with more reason. She indignantly denied that her novels had the evil tendencies imputed to them. Certainly the supposition of the antagonistic spirit of her writings to Christianity and marriage vanishes in proportion to the reader's acquaintance with her works. But against certain doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church which she believed to be pernicious in their influence she from the first declared war, and by her frank audacity made bitter enemies. M. Renan relates that when he was a boy of fifteen his ecclesiastical superiors showed him George Sand, emblematically portrayed for the admonition of the youth under their care, as a woman in black trampling on a cross! Now it is not merely that her own faith was eminently Christian in character, and that the Christian ideal seemed to her the most perfect that has yet presented itself to the mind of man; but if unable to accept for herself the doctrine of revelation as commonly inter-

preted, she is utterly without the aggressiveness of spirit, the petty flippancy that often betray the intellectual bigot under the banner of free thought. She was too large-minded to incline to ridicule the serious convictions of earnest seekers for truth, and she respected all sincerity of belief—all faith that produced beneficence in action.

The alleged hostility of her romances to marriage resumes itself into a declared hostility to the conventional French system of match-making. Much that she was condemned for venturing to put forward we should simply take for granted in England, where—whichever system work the best in practice—to the strictest Philistine's ideas of propriety there is nothing unbecoming in a love match. The aim and end of true love in her stories is always marriage, whether it be the simple attachment of Germain the field-labourer for the rustic maiden of his choice, the romantic predilection of the rich young widow in *Pierre qui roule* for the handsome actor Laurence, or the worship of Count Albert for the *cantatrice* Consuelo. Her ideal of marriage was, no doubt, a high one, "the indissoluble attachment of two hearts fired with a like love," a love "great, noble, beautiful, voluntary, eternal." Among French novelists, she should rather be noted for the extremely small proportion of her numerous romances that have domestic infelicity for a theme.

Her remark that their real offence was that they

were a great deal too moral for some of their critics, hit home, inasmuch as in her attack on the ordinary marriage system of France she struck directly at the fashionable immorality which is its direct result, and which she saw, both in life and in literature, pass free of censure. It is the selfish intriguer who meets with least mercy in her pages, and who is there held up not only to dislike but to ridicule.

Persons perplexed by the fact that particular novels of hers which, judged by certain theories, ought to be morally hurtful, do yet produce a very different effect, have accounted for it in different ways. One explains it by saying that if there is poison on one page there is always the antidote on the next. Another observes that a certain morality of misfortune is never absent from her fictions. In other words, she nowhere presents us with the spectacle of real happiness reaped at the expense of a violation of conscience. And in the rare cases where the purpose of the novel seems questionable, she defeats her own end. For truth always preponderates over error in her conceptions, and the result is a moral effect.

The want of delicacy that not unfrequently disfigures her pages and offends us, offends also as an artistic fault. As a fact it is taste rather than conscience that she is thus apt to shock. For the almost passing coarseness of expression or thought is nothing more than the overflow, the negligent frankness of a

rich and active but healthy nature, not the deliberate obliquity of a corrupt fancy or perverted mind. Such unreserve, unfortunately, has too commonly been the transgression of writers of superabundant energy. But her sins are against outward decorum rather than against the principles upon which the rules of decorum are based. No one was better capable of appreciating and indicating with fine touches, delicacy and niceties of taste and feeling in others. Her sympathy with such sensitiveness is a corrective that should render harmless what might vitiate taste if that qualification were absent. And her stories, though including a very few instances where the subject chosen seems to most English minds too repulsive to admit of possible redemption, and the frequent incidental introduction of situations and frank discussion of topics inadmissible in English fiction of that period—an honourable distinction it seems in some danger of losing in the present—can hardly be censured from the French standpoint, as fair critics now admit. It is inconceivable that a public could be demoralised by *Indiana* and *Valentine*, at a time when no subject seemed wicked and morbid enough to satisfy popular taste. The art of George Sand in the main was sound and healthy, and in flat opposition to the excesses both of the ultra-romantic and ultra-realist schools.

Clearer-sighted critics, perceiving that the impression produced by her works is not one to induce men

and women to defy the laws of their country, nor likely to undermine their religious faith, have gone more to the heart of the matter. The dangerous tendency is more insidious, they say, and more general. Virtue, and not vice, is made attractive in her books; but it is an easy virtue, attained without self-conquest. All her characters, good and bad, act alike from impulse. Those who seek virtue seek pleasure in so doing, and her philosophy of life seems to be that people should do as they like. The morality she commends to our sympathy and admiration is a morality of instinct and emotion, not of reason and principle. Self-renunciation, immolation of desire in obedience to accepted precept is ignored. Sentiment is supreme. Duty, as a motive power, is set aside.

George Sand, who as a writer from first to last appeared as a crusader against the evil, injustice and vice that darken the world, did undoubtedly choose rather to speak out of her heart to our hearts, than out of her head to our heads, and considered moreover that such was the more effectual way. Her idea of virtue lay not in the curbing of evil instincts, but in their conversion or modification by the evoking of good impulses, that "guiding and intensifying of our emotions by a new ideal" which has been called the great work of Christianity.

It is not,—or not in the first place,—that people should do as they like, but that they should like to do

right; and further, that human nature in that ideal life the sentiment of which pervades her works, and in which she saw "no other than the normal life as we are called to know it," does not desire what is hurtful to it.

The goodness that consists in doing right or refraining from doing wrong reluctantly, or in obedience to prescribed rules, or from mechanical habit, had for her no life or charm. The object to be striven for should be nothing less than the "perfect harmony of inward desire and outward obligation."

Virtue should be chosen, though we seem to sacrifice happiness; but that the two are in the beginning identical, that, as expressed by Mr. Herbert Spencer, "whether perfection of nature, virtuousness of action, or rectitude of motive be assigned as the proper aim, the definition of perfection, virtue, rectitude, brings us down to happiness experienced in some form, at some time, by some person as the fundamental idea," is a philosophic truth of which a large *aperçu* is observable in the works of George Sand. Self-sacrifice should spring from direct desire, altruism be spontaneous—a need—becoming a second and a better nature; not won by painful effort, but through the larger development of the principle of sympathy. Strong in her own immense power of sympathy, she applied herself to the task of awakening and extending such sympathies in others. This she does by the

creation of agreeable, interesting, and noble types, such as may put us out of conceit with what is mean and base. Goodness, as understood and portrayed by her, must recommend itself not only to the judgment but to the heart. She worked to popularise high sentiments, and to give shape and reality to vague ideas of human excellence. Her idea of virtue as a motive, not a restraint, not the controlling of low and evil desires, but the precluding of all temptation to yield to these, by the calling out of stronger, higher desires, so far from being a low one, is indeed the very noblest; yet not on that account a chimera to those who hold like her to the conviction that "What now characterises the exceptionally high, may be expected eventually to characterise all. For that which the highest human nature is capable of is within the reach of human nature at large." "We gravitate towards the ideal," she writes, "and this gravitation is infinite, as is the ideal itself." And her place remains among those few great intelligences who can be said to have given humanity an appreciable impulse in the direction of progress.

CHAPTER XII.

LATER YEARS.

WHEN, in 1869, Madame Sand was applied to by M. Louis Ulbach—a literary friend who purposed to write her biography—for some account of her life from that time onwards where her memoirs break off, she replied in a letter now appended to those memoirs, as follows:—

For the last five-and-twenty years there is nothing more that is of interest. It is old age, very quiet and very happy, *en famille*, crossed by sorrows entirely personal in their nature—deaths, defections, and then the general state of affairs in which we have suffered, you and I, from the same causes. My time is spent in amusing the children, doing a little botany, long walks in summer—I am still a first-rate pedestrian—and writing novels, when I can secure two hours in the daytime and two in the evening. I write easily and with pleasure. This is my recreation, for my correspondence is enormous, and there lies work indeed! If one had none but one's friends to write to! But how many requests, some touching, some impertinent! Whenever there is anything I can do, I reply. Those for whom I can do nothing I do not answer. Some deserve that one should try, even with small hope of succeeding. Then one must answer that one will try. All this, with private affairs to which one must really give attention now and then, makes some ten letters a day.

The old age of George Sand, brighter, fuller, and more active than the youth of most men and women, was in itself a most signal proof of the stability and worth of her mental organization. Life, which deteriorates a frail character, told with a perfecting and elevating power upon hers.

Of her earlier personal beauty few traces remained after middle age except a depth of expression in her eyes, the features having become thickened by age. Some among those who, like Dickens, first saw her in her later years and still looked for the semblance of a heroine of romance, failed to find the muse Lélia of their imaginations under the guise of a middle-aged *bourgeoise*. But such impressions were superficial. Her portrait in black and white by Couture, engraved by Manceau, seems to reconcile these apparent discrepancies. Beauty is not here, but the face is so powerful and comprehensive that we perceive there at once the mirror of a mind capable of embracing both the prose and the poetry of life; and by many this portrait is preferred to the earlier likenesses.

Nor is there anything more remarkable in her correspondence than the extremely interesting series of letters, extending from February 1863 to within three months of her death in 1876, and addressed to Gustave Flaubert, at this period her familiar friend. The intercourse of two minds of so different an intellectual and moral order as those of the authors of *Consuelo* and of

Madame Bovary offers to all a curious study. To the admirers of George Sand these letters are invaluable, both from a literary point of view and as a record of her inner life from that time onwards when, as expressed by herself, she resolutely buried youth, and owned herself the gainer by an increasing calm within. The secret of her future happiness she found in living for her children and her friends. That she retained her zest for intellectual pleasures she ascribed to the very fact that she never allowed herself to be absorbed for long in these and in herself.

"Artists are spoilt children," she writes to Flaubert, "and the best of them are great egoists. You tell me I love them too well; I love them as I love woods and fields, all things, all beings that I know a little and make my constant study. In the midst of it all I pursue my calling; and how I love that calling of mine, and all that nourishes and renovates it!"

We must now take up the thread of outward events again, which we have slightly anticipated.

In the autumn of 1860 Madame Sand had a severe attack of typhoid fever. She was then on the point of beginning her little tale, *La Famille de Germandre*; "*le roman de ma fièvre*," she playfully terms it afterwards, when retracing the circumstances in a letter to her old friend François Rollinat:—

The day before that upon which I was suddenly taken very seriously ill, I had felt quite well. I had scribbled the beginning of a novel.

I had placed all my personages; I knew them thoroughly; I knew their situations in the world, their characters, tendencies, ideas, relations to each other. I saw their faces. All that remained to be known was what they were going to do, and I did not trouble my head about that, having time to think it over to-morrow.

Struck down on the morrow, she was for many days in a precarious condition; and in the confused fancies of fever found herself wandering with *La Famille de Germandre* about the country, alighting in ruined castles and encountering the most whimsical adventures in flood and field.

It would have been an easy death, she remarked afterwards, had she died then, as she might, in her dream; but she came to herself to find her son and friends in such anxiety on her account, so overjoyed at her convalescence, that she could not but be glad of the life that was given back to her. Early in 1861 we find her recruiting her forces by a stay at Tamaris, near Toulon, completing the novel interrupted by illness; resuming her long walks and botanic studies, and thoroughly enjoying the sense of returning vital powers.

She stood always in great dread of the idea of possibly losing her activity as she advanced in years. The infirmities of old age, however, she was happily to be spared, preserving her energy and mental faculties, as will be seen, till just before her death. But though she was restored to health and strength, this illness seems to have left its traces on her constitution.

Her son's marriage to Mdlle. Calamatta, spoken of

by Madame Sand as a heart's desire of hers at length fulfilled, took place in 1862, not many months after his return from half a year of travel in Africa and America in the company of Prince Napoleon. The event proved a fresh source of the purest happiness to her, and was not to separate her from her son. The young people settled at Nohant, which remained her head-quarters. There a few years later we find her residing "almost exclusively, except when called by matters of business to her *pied-à-terre* in Paris, where she never lingered long. To the two little grand-daughters, Aurore and Gabrielle, whom she saw spring up in her home, she became passionately devoted. Most of her compositions henceforward are dated from Nohant where, indeed, more than fifty years of her life were spent.

As regards decorum of expression and temperance of sentiments, the later novels of George Sand have earned more praise than censure; but some readers may feel that in fundamental questions of taste, the comparison between them and their forerunners is not always entirely to their advantage. The fervour of youth has a certain purifying power to redeem from offence matter, even though over-frankly treated, which becomes disagreeable in cold analysis, however sober the wording and clear and admirable the moral pointed.

Mademoiselle La Quintinie, which appeared in 1863, was suggested by M. Octave Feuillet's *Sibille.* The

point of M. Feuillet's novel is, that Sibille, an ardent Catholic, stifles her love, and renounces her lover on account of his heterodox opinions. Madame Sand gives us the reverse—a heroine who is reflectively rather than mystically inclined, and whose lover by degrees succeeds in effecting her conversion to his more liberal views. Here, as elsewhere, the author's mind shows a sympathetic comprehension of the standpoint of enlightened Protestantism curiously rare among those who like herself have renounced Romanism for the pursuit of free thought and speculation. But even those who prefer the *dénoûment* of George Sand's novel to that of M. Feuillet's will not rank *Mademoiselle La Quintinie* very high among the author's productions. It is colourless, and artistically weak, however controversially strong.

Madame Sand, according to her own reckoning in 1869, had made at least £40,000 by her writings. Out of this she had saved no fortune. She had always preferred to live from day to day on the proceeds of her work, regulating her expenses accordingly, trusting her brain to answer to any emergency and bring her out of the periodical financial crises in which the uncertainty of literary gains and the liberality of her expenditure involved her. She continued fond of travelling, especially of exploring the nooks and corners of France, felt by her to be less well known than they deserve, and fully as picturesque as the spots

tourists go far to visit. Here she sought fresh frames for her novels. "If I have only three words to say about a place," she tells us, "I like to be able to refer to it in my memory so as to make as few mistakes as possible."

In January 1869 we find her writing of herself in a playful strain to her friend Flaubert:—

The individual called George Sand is quite well, enjoying the marvellous winter now reigning in Berry, gathering flowers, taking note of interesting botanic anomalies, stitching at dresses and mantles for her daughter-in-law, costumes for the marionettes, dressing dolls, reading music, but above all, spending hours with little Aurore, who is a wonderful child. There is not a being on earth more tranquil and happier in his home than this old troubadour retired from business, now and then singing his little song to the moon, singing well or ill, he does not particularly care, so long as he gives the *motif* that is running in his head . . . . . . he is happy, for he is at peace, and can find amusement in everything.

M. Plauchut, another literary friend and a visitor at Nohant during this last decade of her lifetime, gives a picture of the order of her day; it is simplicity itself.

Nine o'clock, in summer and in winter alike, was her hour of waking. Letters and newspapers would then occupy her until noon, when she came down to join the family *déjeûner*. Afterwards she would stroll for an hour in the garden and the wood, visiting and tending her favourite plants and flowers. At two o'clock she would come indoors to give a lesson to her grandchildren in the library, or work there on her own account, undistracted by the romps around her. Dinner

at six was followed by a short evening walk, after which she played with the children, or set them dancing in doors. She liked to sit at the piano, playing over to herself bits of music by her favourite Mozart, or old Spanish and Berrichon airs. After a game of dominoes or cards, she would still sit up so late, occupying herself with water-colour painting or otherwise, that sometimes her son was obliged to take away the lights. These long evenings, the same writer bears witness, sometimes afforded rare opportunities of hearing Madame Sand talk of the events and the men of her time. In the absolute quiet of the country, among a small circle of responsive minds, she, so silent otherwise, became expansive. "Those who have never heard George Sand at such hours," he concludes, "have never known her. She spoke well, with great elevation of ideas, charming eloquence, and a spirit of infinite indulgence." When at length she retired, it was to write on until the morning hours according to her old habit, only relinquished when her health made this imperative.

She had allowed her son and her daughter-in-law to take the cares of household management off her hands. This left her free, as she expressed it, to be a child again, to hold aloof from things immediate and transitory, reserving her thoughts and contemplations for what is general and eternal. She found a poet's pleasure in abstracting herself from human

life, saying, "There are hours when I escape from myself, when I live in a plant, when I feel myself grass, a bird, a tree top, a cloud, a running stream." Shaking off, as it were, the sense of personality she felt more freely and fully the sense of kinship with the life and soul of the universe.

It was her habit every evening to sum up in a few lines the impressions of the day, and this journal, for the conspicuous absence of incident in its pages, she compares to the log-book of a ship lying at anchor. But one terrible and little anticipated break in its tranquil monotony was yet to come.

George Sand lived to see her country pass through every imaginable political experience. Born before the First Republic had expired, she had witnessed the First Empire, the restored Monarchy, the Revolution of 1830, the reign of Louis Philippe, the convulsions of 1848, the presidency of Louis Bonaparte, and the Second Empire. She was still to see and outlive its fall, the Franco-German War, the Commune, and to die, as she was born, under a republic.

To some of her friends who reproached her with showing too much indulgence for the state of things under Imperial rule, she replied that the only change in her was that she had acquired more patience in proportion as more was required. The *régime* she condemned,—and amid apparent prosperity had foretold the corrupting influence on the nation of the established

ideal of frivolity, and that a crash of some kind must ensue. Her judgment on the Emperor after his fall is worth noting, if only because it is dispassionate. Since his elevation to the Imperial dignity she had lost all old illusions as to his public intentions. With regard to these, on the occasion of her interviews with him at the Elysée, he had completely deceived her, and designedly she had at first thought. Nor had she concealed her disgust.

> I left Paris, and did not come to an appointment he had offered me. They did not tell me "The King might have had to wait!" but they wrote "The Emperor waited." However, I continued to write to him, whenever I saw hopes of saving some victim, to ponder his answers, and watch his actions; and I became convinced that he did not intentionally impose upon anyone. He imposed on himself and on everybody else . . . In private life, he had genuine qualities. I happened to see in him a side that was really generous and sincere. His dream of grandeur for France was not that of a sound mind, but neither of an ordinary mind. Really France would have sunk too low if she had submitted for twenty years to the supremacy of a *crétin*, working only for himself. One would then have to give her up in despair for ever and ever. The truth is that she mistook a meteor for a star, a silent dreamer for a man of depth. Then, seeing him sink under disasters she ought to have foreseen, she took him for a coward.

George Sand's *Journal d'un Voyageur pendant la guerre*, has a peculiar and a painful interest. It is merely a note-book of passing impressions from September 1870 to January 1871; but its pages give a most striking picture of those effects of war which have no place in military annals.

The army disasters of the autumn were preceded

by natural calamities of great severity. The heat of the summer in Berry had been tremendous, and Madame Sand describes the havoc as unprecedented in her experience—the flowers and grass killed, the leaves scorched and yellowed, the baked earth underfoot literally cracking in many places; no water, no hay, no harvest, but destructive cattle-plague, forest-fires driving scared wolves to seek refuge in the courtyard of Nohant itself—the remnant of corn spared by the sun, ruined by hail-storms. She and all her family had suffered from the unhealthiness of the season, thus the political catastrophe found her already weakened by anxiety and fatigue, and feeling greatly the effort to set to work again. Finally, an outbreak of malignant small-pox in the village forced her to take her little grandchildren and their mother from Nohant out of reach of the infection. September and October were passed at or in the neighbourhood of Boussac, a small town some thirty miles off. Sedan was over, and the worst had begun; the protracted suspense, the long agony of hope.

Those suffered most perhaps who, like herself, had to wait in enforced inaction, amid the awful dead calm that reigned in the provinces, yet forbidden to forget their affliction for a moment. The peasant was gone from the land—only the old and infirm were left to look after the flocks, to till and sow the field. Madame Sand notes, and with a kind of envy, the stolid patience and industry, the inextinguishable confidence, of poor

old Jacques Bonhomme when things are at the worst. "He knows that in one way or another it is he who will have to pay the expenses of the war; he knows next winter will be a season of misery and want, but he believes in the spring"—in the bounty of nature to repair war's ravages.

During this time of unimaginable trouble some of the strongest minds were unhinged. It is no small honour to George Sand that hers should have preserved its balance. The pages of this journal are distinguished throughout by a wonderful calm of judgment and an equitable tone—not the calm of indifference, but of a broad and penetrating intelligence, no longer to be blinded by the wild excitement and passions of the moment, or exalted by childish hopes one hour to be thrust into the madness of despair the next.

Although tempted now and then to regret that she had recovered from her illness ten years ago, surviving but to witness the abasement of France, she was not, like others, panic-struck at the prospect of invasion as though this meant the end of their country. "It will pass like a squall over a lake," she said.

But it was a time when they could be sure of nothing, except of their distress. The telegraph-wires were cut; rumours of good news they feared to believe would be succeeded by tales of horror they feared to discredit. Tidings would come that three hundred thousand of the enemy had been disposed of in a single engagement

and King William taken prisoner; then of fatal catastrophes befallen to private friends—stories which often proved equally unfounded.

She had friends shut up in Paris of whom she knew not whether they were alive or dead. The strain of anxiety and painful excitement made sleep impossible to her except in the last extremity of fatigue. Yet she had her little grandchildren to care for; and when they came round her, clamouring for the fairy-tales she was used to supply, she contented them as well as she could and gave them their lessons as usual, anxious to keep them from realising the sadness the causes of which they were too young to understand.

It was the first time that she had known a distress that forbade her to find a solace in nature. She describes how one day walking out with some friends and following the course of the river Tarde, she had half-abandoned herself to the enjoyment of the scene—the cascade, the dragon-flies skimming the surface, the purple scabious flowers, the goats clambering on the boulders of rock that strewed the borders and bed of the stream—when one of the party remarks, "Here's a retreat pretty well fortified against the Prussians."

And the present, forgotten for an instant in reverie, came back upon her with a shock.

Letters in that district took three or four days to travel thirty miles. Newspapers were rarely to be

procured; and when procured, made up of contradictions, wild suggestions, and the pretentious speeches of national leaders, meant to be reassuring, but marked by a vagueness and violence from which Madame Sand rightly augured ill.

The red-letter days were those that brought communications from their friends in Paris by the aerial post. On October 11, two balloons respectively called the "George Sand" and the "Armand Barbès" left the capital. "My name," she remarks, "did not bring great good luck to the first—which suffered injuries and descended with difficulty, yet rescued the Americans who had gone up in it." The "Barbès" had a smoother but a more famous flight; alighting and depositing M. Gambetta safely at Tours.

As the autumn advanced Madame Sand and her family were enabled to return to Nohant. But what a return was that? The enemy were quartered within forty miles, at Issoudun; the fugitives thence were continually seen passing, carrying off their children, their furniture and their merchandise to places of security. Already the enemy's guns were said to have been heard at La Châtre. Madame Sand walked in her garden daily among her marigolds, snapdragon and ranunculus, making curious speculations as to what might be in store for herself and her possessions. She remarks:—

You get accustomed to it, even though you have not the con-

solation of being able to offer the slightest resistance . . . I look at my garden, I dine, I play with the children, whilst waiting in expectation of seeing the trees felled roots upwards; of getting no more bread to eat, and of having to carry my grandchildren off on my shoulders; for the horses have all been requisitioned. I work, expecting my scrawls to light the pipes of the Prussians.

But the enemy, though so near, never passed the boundaries of the "Black Valley." The department of the Indre remained uninvaded, though compassed on all sides by the foreign army; and George Sand was able to say afterwards that she at least had never seen a Prussian soldier.

A sad Christmas was passed. On the last night of 1870 a meeting of friends at Nohant broke up with the parting words, "All is lost!"

"The execrable year is out," writes Madame Sand, "but to all appearances we are entering upon a worse."

On the 15th of January 1871 her little drama *François le Champi*, first represented in the troublous months of 1849, was acted in Paris for the benefit of an ambulance. She notes the singular fate of this piece to be reproduced in time of bombardment. A pastoral!

The worst strain of suspense ended January 29, with the capitulation of Paris. Here the *Journal d'un Voyageur* breaks off. It would be sad indeed had her life, like that of more than one of her compeers, closed then over France in mourning. Although it was impossible but that such an ordeal must have

impaired her strength, she outlived the war's ending, and the horrible social crisis which she had foreseen must succeed the political one. Happier than Prosper Mérimée, than Alexandre Dumas, and others, she saw the dawn of a new era of prosperity for her country, whose vital forces, as she had also foretold, were to prevail in the end over successive ills—the enervation of corruption, of military disaster, and the "orgie of pretended renovators" at home that signalized the first months of peace abroad.

In January 1872 we again find her writing cheerily to Flaubert:—

Mustn't be ill, mustn't be cross, my old troubadour. Say that France is mad, humanity stupid, and that we are unfinished animals every one of us, you must love on all the same, yourself, your race, above all, your friends. I have my sad hours. I look at my blossoms, those two little girls smiling as ever, their charming mother, and my good hard-working son, whom the end of the world will find hunting, cataloguing, doing his daily task, and yet as merry as Punch in his rare leisure moments.

In a later letter she writes in a more serious strain:—

I do not say that humanity is on the road to the heights; I believe it in spite of all, but I do not argue about it, which is useless, for everyone judges according to his own eyesight, and the general outlook at the present moment is ugly and poor. Besides, I do not need to be assured of the salvation of our planet and its inhabitants in order to believe in the necessity of the good and the beautiful; if our planet departs from this law it will perish; if its inhabitants discard it they will be destroyed. As for me, I wish to hold firm till my last breath, not with the certainty or the demand to find a "good place" elsewhere, but because my sole pleasure is to maintain myself and mine n the upward way.

The last five years of her life saw her pen in full activity. In the *Revue des Deux Mondes, Malgrétout*, the novel of 1870, was succeeded by *Flamarande* and *Les Deux Frères*—compositions executed with unflagging energy and animation of style—*La Tour de Percemont*, and a series of graceful fairy-stories entitled, *Contes d'une grand'mère*. *Nanon* (1872), a rustic romance of the First Revolution, is a highly remarkable little work, possibly suggested by her recent experiences of the effect of public disturbances on remote country places.

She was also a constant contributor to the newspaper *Le Temps*. A critical notice by her hand of M. Renan's *Dialogues et Fragments Philosophiques*, reprinted from those columns, bears date May 1876, immediately before she succumbed to the illness which in a few days was to cut short her life.

At the beginning of this year she had written on this subject to Flaubert, in the brave spirit she would fain impart to her weaker brethren:—

Life is perhaps eternal, and work in consequence eternal. If so, let us finish our march bravely. If otherwise, if the individual perish utterly, let us have the honour of having done our task. That is duty, for our only obvious duties are to ourselves and our fellow creatures. What we destroy in ourselves we destroy in them. Our abasement abases them; our falls drag them down; we owe to them to stand fast, to save them from falling. The desire to die early is a weakness, as is the desire to live long.

George Sand, like most persons of an exceptional constitution, had little faith in the efficacy for herself of medical science. She was persuaded that the pre-

scribed remedies did her more harm than good, and on more than one occasion when her health had caused her children uneasiness, they had had to resort to an affectionate *ruse* to induce her to take advice. Her habit of disregarding physical ailments, fighting against them as a weakness, and working on in their despite, led her to neglect for too long failing health that should have been attended to. During the whole of May 1876 Madame Sand, though suffering from real illness, continued to join in the household routine, and to proceed with her literary work as usual. Not till the last days of the month did she, unable any longer to make light of her danger, at length consent to send for professional advice. It was then too late. She was suffering from internal paralysis. The medical attention which, sought earlier, might, in the opinion of the doctors, have prolonged her life for years, could now do nothing to avert the imminent fatal consequences of her illness. "It is death," she said; "I did not ask for it, but neither do I regret it." For beyond the sorrow of parting it had no peculiar terrors for her, she had viewed and could meet it in another spirit. "Death is no more," she had written; "it is life renewed and purified."

She lingered for a week, in great suffering, but bearing all with fortitude and an unflinching determination not to distress those around her by painful complaining. Up to her last hour she preserved con-

sciousness and lucidity. The words, "*Ne touchez pas à la verdure,*" among the last that fell from her lips, were understood by her children, who knew her wish that the trees should be undisturbed under which in the village cemetery she was soon to find a resting-place—a wish that has been sacredly respected.

Her suffering ceased a short while before death, which came to her so quietly that the transition was almost imperceptible to the watchers by her side. It was on the morning of the 8th of June. She was within a month of completing her seventy-second year. Although her life's work had long since been mainly accomplished, yet the extinction of that great intelligence was felt by many—as fitly expressed by M. Renan —"like a diminution of humanity."

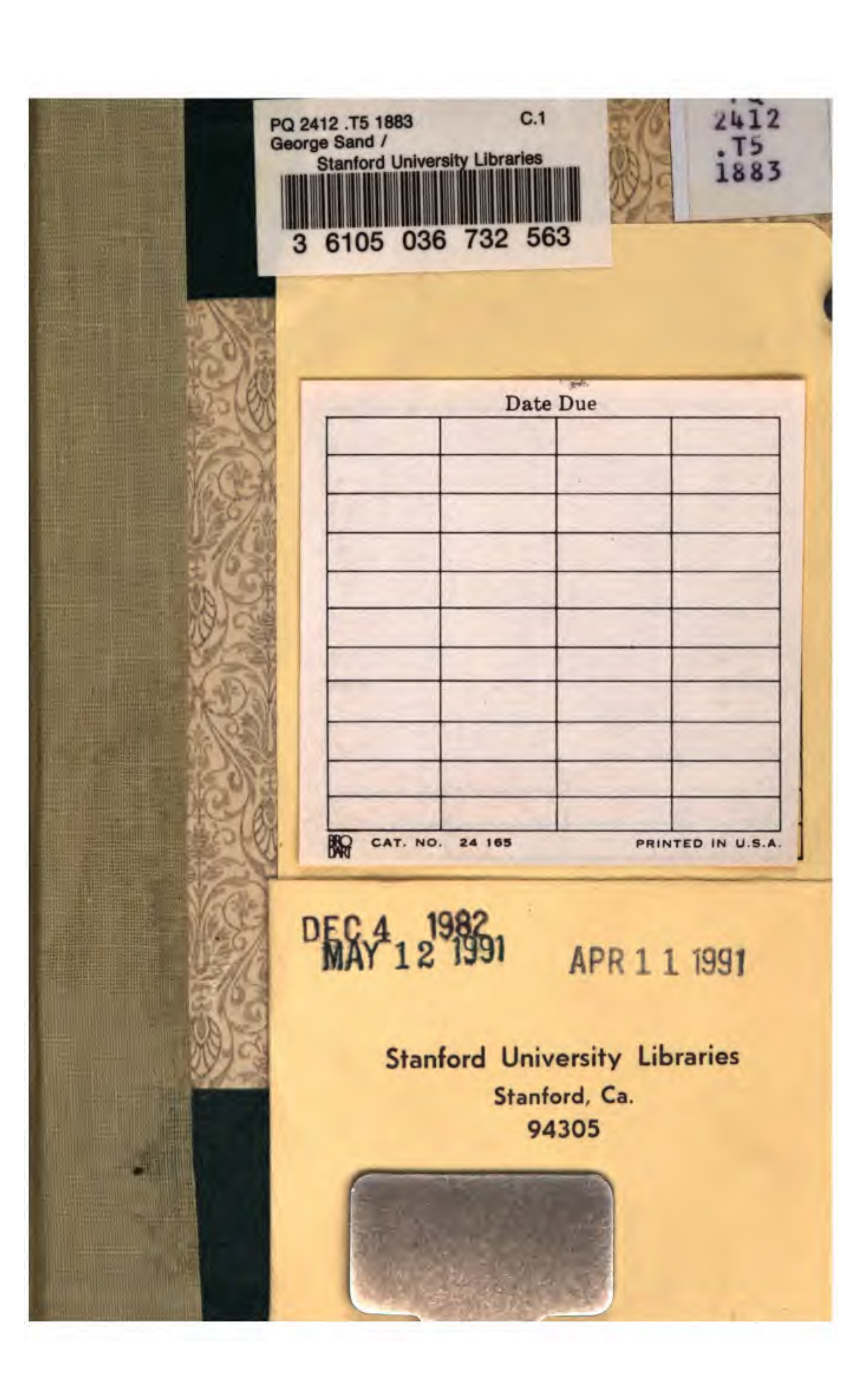
Two days later she was buried in the little cemetery of Nohant, that adjoins her own garden wall. The funeral was conducted with extreme simplicity, in accordance with her taste and spirit. The scene was none the less a memorable one. The rain fell in torrents, but no one seemed to regard it; the country-people flocking in from miles around, old men standing bare-headed for hours heedless of the deluge. The peasant and the prince, Parisian leaders of the world of thought and letters and the humblest and most unlearned of her poorer neighbours, stood together over her grave.

Six peasants carried the bier from the house to the

church, a few paces distant. The village priest came, preceded by three chorister-boys and the venerable singing-clerk of the parish, to perform the ceremony. A portion of the little churchyard, railed off from the rest and planted with evergreen-trees, contains the graves of her grandmother, her father, and the two little grandchildren she had lost. A plain granite tomb in their midst now marks the spot where George Sand was laid, literally buried in flowers.

A great spirit was gone from the world; and a good spirit, it will be generally acknowledged; an artist in whose work the genuine desire to leave those she worked for better than she found them is one inspiring motive. Such endeavour may seem to fail, and she affirmed, "A hundred times it does fail in its immediate results. But it helps notwithstanding to preserve that tradition of good desires and of good deeds, without which all would perish."

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